

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

MARCH, 1924

Vol. LXXXI

NUMBER 2

Spending the Evening

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—A STORY OF THE NIGHT LIFE OF
PARIS

By John D. Swain

Author of "The Last Man on Earth," "Billy Kane—White and Unmarried," etc.

IN a small chamber of an unpretentious hotel on the Rue Duphot, near the Madeleine, a young man was methodically packing his traveling bag.

He was a lanky, loose-jointed, tall, and rather good-looking American, studious and Middle Western in type. By vocation he was associate professor of French in Mansard, a fresh-water college of the coeducational group. He had chosen a small hostelry to which few foreigners came, because of its reasonable rates, and because all its staff spoke French. The morrow would mark the end of his two weeks' sojourn, and with characteristic thoroughness he was running over his diary and notebooks, to make certain that he had omitted nothing which properly belonged to his itinerary.

He had devoted an afternoon each to Fontainebleau and Versailles. Notre Dame and the Pantheon and the Invalides had been painstakingly done, and the Eiffel

Tower ascended. One morning he had risen long before daybreak to see the Halles Centrales. The art galleries had not been forgotten. This very day he had paid his third and last visit to the Louvre, and even now his mind was throbbing with acres of the fat, creamy blondes of Rubens—ladies averaging, he guessed, about one hundred and eighty pounds to the hoof, and wearing few clothes, if any.

He shook his head impatiently, vexed that these luscious females should persist in wallowing in a sort of rustic gambol before his mind's eye; for Horace Barnes was not a ladies' man, and his principles were those which the Mansard faculty expected its incumbents to hold.

On one evening he had attended the Opéra. Another had found him enjoying a classic drama at the Odéon. On all the remaining nights he had sat in his room, reading ferociously along lines laid down

when he was planning this, his first trip abroad.

"In the Footsteps of Du Maurier" had already been neatly packed in his bag, beside his socks. Carlyle's "French Revolution" followed it. "Les Misérables" and a couple of Molière's plays, in paper jackets, waited only until Horace's second suit of underwear should have been bestowed.

He paused to fill and light his pipe, and to take a final glance through his guidebook, with its maps and its detailed information on everything pertaining to the Queen City.

His eye fell upon a paragraph in the section devoted to amusements:

Paris contains many resorts, garish or sordid, supported almost wholly by tourists, who have helped to foist upon the city an undeserved reputation for levity or licentiousness. The sight-seer comes expecting to find something racy, and the thrifty natives supply its ingenious counterfeit. In certain cabarets of Montmartre one may behold make-believe Apaches, artists' models, and starveling poets, who reap a generous harvest from the credulous.

He nodded in solemn agreement. He had always known this to be so; but he had not cheapened himself by gaping at scantily attired ladies whose nimble capers revealed much and promised more, nor had he shuddered to have some brooding figure in velveteen trousers and peaked cap pointed out to him as a famous murderer, mysteriously left at large by the highly intelligent police of Paris. Instead, he had spent his evenings in refreshing his mind by re-reading classics of French literature, or weighty descriptions from the pens of famous travelers.

To-night, and for the first time—possibly because he realized that it was his last evening in Paris, perhaps because he was still pestered by the great Flemish painter's frank joyance in superabundant and amazingly healthy young flesh—he was tempted to look in on one of these cabarets, whose allure, for him, was safely neutralized by his knowledge that it was all a fake.

It would at least be amusing to watch other tourists being taken in, and to enjoy the feeling of superiority that one derives from such credulity in others. He would only stay for an hour or so, sipping a bock or a grenadine, deaf to the blandishments of the waiters urging him to buy poor champagne at an exorbitant price, and dismissing with the bland smile of sophistication any young woman who might mistake him for

a lonesome goop yearning to listen to her artificial compliments and to buy expensive drinks for her.

His eyes strayed again to the open page of the guidebook. It contained a list of Montmartre resorts. The editor, having issued his warning, nevertheless would not deprive youth of its fling, if it must have it. Here they were, curiously named from animals or insects, alive or dead, with an equivocal tag invented to stimulate the stranger's curiosity.

The Floating Kidney, the Sick Toad, the Glue Pot, he solemnly inventoried them until, coming to L'Œuf d'Or, he paused.

"The Golden Egg—at least that doesn't sound repulsive," he thought.

He finished packing, put on his hat, and went below, to inquire of the *portier* as to the easiest way to reach the place afoot. The night was mellow, and he saw no sense in wasting money on a taxi. To-morrow he would be on his way to London. It might well be that he would regret it, if he had left Paris without so much as a passing glance at one of the dives to which the average tourist wings his way as soon as he has booked his room and changed his clothes.

The young professor strolled up the Avenue de l'Opéra, past the opera house, up the Chaussée d'Antin to the Rue de Clichy, and across the boulevard of the same name. It was a longish walk, but the gay crowds, the spirit of feverish unrest in the air, the smartly gowned women and swagger men who were hurrying to or from some place of amusement or refreshment, the elegant cars that purred up the hill slope, distracted his mind agreeably; and before he realized it he found himself opposite a dark, tunnel-like little street, down which, on the left, a huge illuminated yellow egg marked his destination.

Two minutes later, the watchful *patron* had sized him up in a swift *coup d'œil* as he passed within.

"Young, alone, American, well dressed in loose-fitting tweeds, of a melancholy caste."

A snap of his pudgy fingers, and an alert *garçon* took him in charge. A little *chasseur* strove valiantly, but in vain, to secure his Stetson and walking stick. A *sommelier* bore down with the wine card, and Horace Barnes found himself seated at a little table for two, with the other chair tilted up against it.

All about him were other guests, laughing and singing or merely goggle-eyed, enjoying themselves or hoping to do so. Corks popped; glasses rang; an American jazz quartet proved that brass and wood instruments could be coaxed to emit sounds undreamed of by their inventors; and on a little platform at one end a small person bearing a large gilded *papier mâché* egg was nonchalantly smiling and waving recognition to acquaintances in the room.

The system proved too much for Horace's Spartan resolves. It was too smooth, too long established. With three attendants hovering near, and the important-looking bottles being decanted on all sides, he found himself too cowardly to order a mere *sirup*. He struggled feebly against a bland deference that would not be rebuffed, and was presently served with a celestial nappy of tripe, which nestled beneath a sauce of fine herbs and button mushrooms and oyster crabs, together with a dark bottle to whose opaque surface cobwebs had been skillfully transferred.

For the first and only time in his life he tasted tripe, but without knowing that he did so. He sipped a white wine that was not quite so good as the russet cider at home, despite its alleged vintage and its certain price. He lighted a cigarette, not sure of the propriety of his homely pipe in this place.

These highly essential details attended to, his eyes strayed to where the little girl was standing on her platform. He had not particularly noticed her in the bustle of getting himself settled; but now her impish beauty stirred something in his breast that had, this same afternoon, been surprisingly roused by the placid curves of Rubens's massive blondes.

Perhaps it was the very contrast that flogged his senses; for the *chanteuse* was slender, dark, with a touch of the gamin in her. Masses of soot-black hair were tossed in artful carelessness atop of her pert head. He noted that where it grew high on her neck there were no stray wisps, but a clean line as definite as if she wore a wig—which very manifestly she did not. Her eyebrows were of the same dull black, with the sweep of a raven's wings above her large, brilliant eyes. Her face was oval, the lips stained scarlet, the mouth large enough for a man-size kiss, the cheek bones a trifle higher than in the Anglo-Saxon type.

On the beach at Atlantic City, she would have been compelled to wear more clothes; but Horace boldly decided that she had on plenty. No stockings; there were dimples in her knees, and he could see the blue veins in her ankles where they disappeared into ridiculous fur-edged, high-heeled red shoes.

Her arms and shoulders were disturbing. He caught himself speculating upon the possibility of having her throw her arms about his neck, and cursed himself roughly, if silently. This wasn't at all like him! He was notoriously unobservant as to what women wore—or didn't wear—or, indeed, of anything about them save that they were either young or old, intelligent or otherwise.

Perhaps, he thought, there was something in the atmosphere of these places, something deliberately contrived, that made one sit up and take notice. Whatever it was, he was too honest to deny that he would deprive himself of many luxuries, and cut his itinerary ruthlessly, to have this radiant little hired provoker kiss him just once, and really want to do it!

Alarmed by turbulent impulses to which he was unaccustomed, he rather wished that he had stayed in his little room and finished "The Beginnings of Gothic Architecture." Martine's architecture—her whispered name had reached him by now from an adjacent table—was not at all Gothic, nor classic, either. It was—was—well, perhaps "rococo" would best describe it. Cunning—diminutive—with funny little curlicues and unexpected curves—*damn!* He fell to once more upon his disguised tripe.

Martine, unaware, perhaps—though not necessarily so—of the disturbance she had created in the bosom of the young American, was removing the top of her golden egg. From it emerged an extraordinary-looking cat. Its like Horace had never beheld. It was, in fact, of an Australian breed, with short, thick fur like plush, and mottled in design. It had no eyebrows or whiskers—which gave to its face a curiously wizened, sagacious appearance.

The animal stretched, yawned, and waited patiently, while its mistress attached to its neck the string to which the paper egg was fastened. Then it walked off stage towing the egg behind, and in the air, supported by a small balloon.

Even as the cat hopped down, Martine,

with her hands on her slender hips, leaning over the room with an impudent confidence, had begun to sing.

Even an associate professor of French finds himself following with some difficulty the evanescent *argot* of the Parisian boulevards. It changes overnight. It has double and even triple meanings concealed in its twisted phrases, its accents, its perverse vocabulary. It was well for Horace's peace of mind that he got but a little of Martine's meaning; but he got enough to make him turn red and feel ashamed, as if he had blundered into a boudoir, to find its dainty mistress rather more than half undressed.

He glanced furtively about him. Everywhere he beheld delighted glances, avid mouths, or the inane grin of those who comprehended not and bitterly regretted it. Nobody seemed offended; and in this atmosphere of complacency Horace gradually conquered his uneasiness, though not his distaste.

Somehow, coming from that perfect, smiling young mouth, through teeth that would have depressed a dentist, the words sounded infinitely worse than if overheard in smoking car or pool room. Yet, perversely, he still longed to touch her, to feel those gayly naughty lips close softly upon his own.

He was glad that he was alone. His feeling was so strong that he made sure it must reveal itself in his set features.

He carefully refrained from looking at her as, amid a roar of approval, she finished her encore and stepped down to the floor level. He feared lest through some diabolical feminine instinct she might catch his burning eyes, and, in the unconventional fashion which he had heard prevailed in cabarets, make her way to his table. This would be ecstatic, but terrible—also, probably, very expensive.

She did, in fact, come much nearer to him than he had expected.

Directly opposite him sat a couple to whom he had found his attention drawn more than once. The man, a mere boy, was unquestionably American, and from his dress and manners Horace guessed him to be a representative of our gilded youth. He was self-assured and rather noisy, and was engaged in drinking, one after the other, potent liquors of great variety, as suggested to him by his quieter but equally assured companion, a pretty enough blonde, who would hardly have qualified as a model

for Rubens, but who was nevertheless a fair armful.

The nationality of this girl Horace could not guess. She spoke perfect French, and good, though somewhat bookish, English; and several times she had interjected phrases of some musical tongue to him unknown—Russian, possibly, he thought. She was clad in black velvet, and, attached to a slender chain, a single enormous diamond winked craftily upon her creamy breast.

Martine's songs had appealed to this pair; and now, as she stood talking with a man who, by his attire, was probably an example of the synthetic Apaches who lent local color to the Montmartre resorts, as set forth in the guide book, the young American sent his waiter to fetch the singer and her companion over to his table.

They came readily enough, sketchy introductions followed, and an instant *camaraderie* was established. It appeared that Martine had little English, the fellow with her none; so the conversation was carried on in French.

Horace's waiter leaned forward to breathe:

"That, *monsieur*, is Bastien, a desperate character. He is known to have garrotted five men!"

"Yeah!" growled Horace Barnes. "Well, he'd better keep away from me, or I'll take him apart!"

Which sanguinary and most unprofessional threat was lost on the *garçon*. Horace, surprised at his own grouchiness, was dismayed to realize that it was provoked by the free and easy terms on which Martine and Bastien seemed to stand.

At the other table, meanwhile, the American boy was inspired to order something unique. He suggested an old-fashioned whisky cocktail as sufficiently unusual for this place. Martine wrinkled her nose.

"And what is it that it is, this cocktail of yesteryear?"

The boy sighed gustily.

"Back in the dear, dead days of long ago, it was a real he-man's drink in God's country!"

He leaned toward the *sommelier*, who was never more than ten feet distant from his elbow, and began carefully and slowly to explain just what he required. There was no difficulty about the whisky or the bitters. The little cubes of ice were also to be had; but—the so very thick glass!

The *sommelier* shrugged, the youth loudly proclaimed that no real old-fashioned cocktail could be served in anything else.

The *patron* crossed over, listened obsequiously. Waiters scurried to the service pantry. In the end, they were able to produce only plain tumblers of thin glass. The American nearly wept, but manfully proceeded to mix, with utmost care, the venerable concoction.

They drank noisily and enthusiastically, though Horace noted that Martine shuddered slightly, and even Bastien looked grim as he downed the powerful blend.

Then a startling interruption banished from Horace's mind all thought of such trifles as drinks, old or new.

A shabby, long-haired, and not too clean man, garnished richly with whiskers, had risen to read one of his—as yet—unpublished poems, when suddenly the lights snapped off and the place was plunged into profound obscurity. In the startled silence which reacted to this unannounced number, the air was ripped as by a cold chisel when one of the girls—not Martine, Horace thought—screamed in terror, or in pain.

Horace half rose in his seat, his hand unconsciously pressed against the pocket where ticked his sixteen-dollar watch.

II

ONLY an instant could have elapsed when the lights winked on again. It was the *patron* whose hand was at the controlling fork, and he was angrily inquiring who had interfered with it.

Nobody seemed to know. A general confusion reigned, although only those in the immediate vicinity of Barnes understood what had happened. His eyes, guided by the scream in the dark, had turned swiftly to where the ill assorted quartet sat.

The girl with the young American sat bolt upright, one hand clutching her broken chain, her blue eyes distended with fear and anger.

"My diamond!" she gasped. "Somebody has taken it!"

Her escort, with a muttered exclamation, grasped her hand and pulled it away; and Barnes saw at once that the great solitaire no longer glittered upon her breast. The others, Martine and Bastien, sat quietly enough, their eyes fixed intently upon the dangling chain, while the *patron* crossed over to their table, his bushy eyebrows raised in inquiry.

"I—I felt a tug," the blond girl stammered, "the instant the lights went out. Even before they snapped on, I knew what had happened. It was all planned out!"

Barnes's compatriot whispered to his waiter, who nodded and shuffled rapidly to the street door, returning after a few minutes with a *sergent de ville*. Like his colleagues in every country where there are policemen, the *sergent* produced a little notebook and a pencil, and began to ask questions.

Who had turned off the light? Or, who was in a position to have done so?

Nobody was able to answer. The *comptoir* was in the corner beside the entrance. At its end, in the partition wall, was a swing door, which opened into a narrow hall leading to the kitchens. The electric switch was on the wall close beside this door. The *patron* was within reach of it, without leaving the seat he occupied. Indeed, he had reached out and turned the lights on within two or three seconds after they had gone out.

There were always waiters hurrying in and out of the service door, but all had alibis; nor could any guest recall seeing one near the door at the time.

A second police officer had joined the first by now, and the examination centered about the table itself. It was searched painstakingly, and the floor beneath it was scrutinized. Finally, after being taken into a little private office, Martine was rigidly searched with the assistance of the proprietor's wife, after which Bastien was overhauled from stem to stern.

The young American offered himself also, but his companion indignantly refused to permit him to suffer this indignity. The policemen then took his name and address, which he gave as Robert Underhill, a guest at the Continental Hotel. Together with the victim's address, this was entered in the little book.

Just as they were turning to leave, it occurred to one of them to take the names of those who sat nearest their table, one of whom was Horace Barnes. Beyond furnishing his address, and receiving a keenly appraising glance, he had no part in the interrogation.

The two agents were scarcely outside when Underhill and the girl left, accompanied to the door by the *patron*, who protested volubly that he was eternally desolated that so mysterious and unfortunate

an incident should have occurred, for the first and only time, in his orderly and most respectable establishment.

When they had gone, Martine rose with a shrug, bestowed upon Bastien only the curtest of farewell nods, and, going to her little platform, helped to still the nervous chatter with one of her topical songs. Bastien himself had scarcely moved since returning from his search. He now sat slumped into his chair, his heavy lids lowered, a *caporal* drooping from one corner of his sullen mouth. He finished the dregs of his whisky cocktail, set the glass down, and thrust both hands into his trouser pockets, his face as expressionless as a wooden soldier's.

Horace found himself watching the fellow to the exclusion of all else. No longer was he exasperated by the outrageous frankness of Martine's song. He heard it without taking heed. He sipped his wine without knowing that he did so, and lighted a fresh cigarette automatically.

Bastien intrigued him. Despite his incredulity when the *garçon* had whispered of the man's criminal record, it seemed to Barnes that the Apache—real or make-believe—was most likely to have secured the *solitaire*. Of course, he couldn't have put out the lights. No doubt some accomplice had attended to that.

Horace would not permit himself to suspect the little singer; nor would it have been easy for her to reach across a wide table to where the blond girl lolled back in her chair, easily a distance of four feet, with a tall vase of cut flowers intervening. But Bastien's face was not one to inspire confidence. His eyes were shifty and cunning, his mouth thin and cruel, his chin weak. Thoroughly as he had been searched, Horace Barnes was not satisfied.

Of course—the vagrant thought crossed his mind—young Underhill might be the thief; but not if he knew anything about physiognomy, and nobody can teach young men and women for a period of years without learning something of that.

The girl herself might have taken advantage of the sudden darkness to hide the jewel, for purposes of her own—to get Underhill to buy her another, for example. Or, as one of the officers had suggested, a soft-footed, swift-handed pickpocket, knowing the exact second to act, might have leaped in, wrenched the *solitaire* from its frail chain, and been twenty feet away be-

fore the proprietor's hand found the switch. There were so many things that might have happened that only by arresting practically everybody present, and subjecting them to the adroit and severe interrogation for which Paris detectives are famous, could one hope for a solution.

These thoughts flitted through Horace's mind while he watched the inert Bastien, who of all concerned seemed the least interested. It was a pose, perhaps, or mere stolidity. At any rate, find who doused the lights, and you had the mystery solved!

Curious that no one had seen a hand reach out to turn the fork. Probably the fact was that more than one was in the secret, or at least sympathetic toward the criminal rather than the victim, and unwilling to testify.

Again, it was possible that the accomplice had never entered the room at all, but had lurked outside in the hall, exposing no more than an arm. The *patron* himself didn't look too scrupulous, so far as that went. He might have the stone even now, waiting to split the proceeds three or four ways later on, when convinced that the police were not pressing the hunt.

Just as Barnes grew tired of speculating and of staring fixedly at the back of Bastien's head, the latter moved. He slowly and lazily scanned the room. Apparently he found that he was for the time unobserved, save by Horace—who, sitting directly behind him, was able to busy himself with his menu when the Apache finally revolved completely in his chair and swept him within range of his vision.

The second that Bastien's eyes left him, Horace's were back on the job. They beheld a curious thing—one which Bastien made no effort to hide, and which would ordinarily attract no attention in this place, where the amenities of the table were not too scrupulously observed.

Reaching indolently toward the glass which stood before the place where the blond girl had but lately sat, Bastien thrust two dirty fingers into it, removed one of the little cubes of ice that were slowly melting there, and put the cube in his mouth.

The fact that made this act noteworthy was that there were similar cubes in all the glasses, including Bastien's. It was conceivable that he might wish to refresh himself with a morsel of ice, a rarity to the ordinary Frenchman; but why this particular piece?

The answer flashed back ineluctably—*because it was not a piece of ice at all.* Rather it was something that looked so much like ice that it had lain there all the time, under the eyes of the girl and of the police themselves!

The very name was revealing. The underworld of Paris, as Horace knew from reading much fiction, always spoke of diamonds as "ice." Lying just where Bastien had dropped it, amid cubes of ice not dissimilar in size or shape, it had been more effectively concealed than if cleverly palmed from hand to hand, to rest in some pocket in the far corner of the room. In the very simplicity of the device lay its beauty.

The blood sang in Horace's veins. The adventure had now reached out and taken him into its embrace. He was a part of it, and it remained with him to decide just what part that should be.

First of all, he must be prepared to move without delay. His hat and stick he had luckily retained. His reckoning—he must settle that!

Calling the *garçon*, he scanned the items with less care than he usually bestowed upon a bill, and vaguely felt that the charge was excessive. He paid, however, and added a tip so liberal that no argument could ensue. Meanwhile his eyes had not really left Bastien, who rose leisurely just as Horace got back his change.

The man's mouth was working slowly. Horace could have sworn that a fragment of ice would have been dissolved before this. If he felt any doubts, they departed when Bastien, having risen, stretched, yawned, and put his hand to his lips. Unmistakably the Frenchman carried something away from his mouth, and thrust it carelessly into his breeches pocket.

What should Horace do? Call the police again? Before they could arrive Bastien would have gone, and would be lost in the intricate network of Montmartre alleys. Boldly accuse Bastien, to his face or through the *patron*?

He glanced about the room. Here and there, amid the faces of tourists like himself, or honest-looking workingmen, were characters who looked as if they would enjoy nothing better than a rough house, in which no doubt knives and heavy boots would figure, and the amenities of the late Marquis of Queensberry would be held in derision.

Even as he hesitated, Bastien drew his

cap from a coat pocket, settled it upon his bullet head, and sauntered toward the door, with a surly nod to the *patron*. Horace also rose, and followed, scarce heeding the proprietor's oily smile and his hope that *monsieur* would condescend to honor them in the future.

A glance thrown over his shoulder revealed Martine standing on her platform, with her song ended, and—as it seemed to him—with eyes unusually large and anxious fixed upon himself. As he turned, she stooped, picked up her odd-looking cat, and stepped down to the floor level, where he could see her no longer. Then he was out in the dark street, some fifty feet behind the figure of Bastien, which was no longer indolent and slouching, but was hurrying with long strides toward the Boulevard de Clichy.

Horace quickened his own steps, and Bastien, without looking around, broke into a half run. Thereupon, his mind made up, the American put his long legs into play, and rapidly overhauled the Apache—and just in time. The fellow was ducking into a little alley, a mere crack between two moldering old houses which reared many unlighted stories into the air. Down this vile hole not so much as a *bec de gaz* illuminated the way.

A long arm shot out, and sinewy fingers bit into the Apache's coat collar. He twisted like an eel, and endeavored to slip out of its sleeves, leaving it as a hostage in his captor's hands. At once his ankles were smartly kicked aside, and he sat suddenly down on the *pavé*. His snaky eyes glittered up into Horace's, while one hand flashed to his belt.

"None of that, now, or I'll have to hang one on your jaw!"

The words were meaningless, but not the gesture of the knotted fist. Bastien knew by repute the amazing proficiency of the American fist—as soporific an instrument as a sandbag, when applied as these cursed foreigners knew how. He arrested his hand.

"Name of a name of a sacred dog! What does *monsieur* mean, then, assaulting innocent strangers on the streets of Paris? Does he perhaps think that he is in his beloved country, where such violence is esteemed a small matter?"

"Attendez!" Horace shook the whining creature, and advanced that hateful fist a little nearer Bastien's retreating chin.

"Give me that diamond you stole, and do it quick, or I'll drag you by the scruff till we come to a *sergent de ville*!"

Bastien protested. He knew not what the strange gentleman was talking about. Diamond? He was lucky if he saw a glass of bock and a dish of *pot au feu*, not to speak of precious stones—

Horace was excited, and a little afraid—not of his captive, but of the locality. At any moment that black alley might spew forth crouching figures, yearning to stick their long, sharp knives into the most sacred parts of himself. No policeman, nobody at all, in sight.

He did what perhaps he would not have done had there been time to reflect. He planted his fist squarely on the flat nose of the Apache. The blood gushed out, and Bastien howled with rage; but when the fist was raised again, he yielded. He dug into his pocket and produced the missing *solitaire*.

Even in that dim light, the stone glowed as if phosphorescent; but Horace did not stop to admire it. He thrust it into his own pocket, at the same time dragging Bastien to his feet and sending him on his way with a kick planted where its leverage was most effective.

In doing this, he roused a devil in the Frenchman that the blow, and even the rape of his loot, had not fully stirred. Bastien had been kicked! His *amour propre*—which, curiously enough, he possessed in full degree—was wounded unto death. He sped away down the street, but from time to time he looked back over his shoulder, his features inhuman with rage, and vitriolic words cascading from his bleeding lips.

"*Vieux crétin!*" he squealed. "Grandson of an illegitimate cauliflower! *Mort aux vaches!* Death to all spies!"

Even as Bastien's footfalls faded into the night, they were replaced by other and lighter ones. Horace turned, to behold the little singing girl from the Golden Egg. She still wore her cabaret costume, concealed under a long cloth cloak edged with cheap fur. She was breathing heavily, and was clutching to her breast the cat which had assisted in her act.

With her free hand she seized Horace's elbow, the small oval of her face looking up into his, her voice hoarse with emotion.

"You—you have it—the big diamond, *monsieur?*"

"Yes," he said simply. "So you knew that Bastien was the thief?"

Martine nodded.

"But not till I saw him take something from his mouth! *Cochon* that the *agent* was, imbecile not to look there when he searched him!"

Horace explained the trick whereby the Apache had concealed the jewel, while yet leaving it in plain sight. Martine nodded vigorously.

"Oh, he is of an intelligence, that *mauvais enfant*! I made sure he had stolen it, but where it was hidden I could not guess. Listen to me, *monsieur*! We have not a moment to lose. The diamond and your very life are not worth one small sou in this place. In five minutes, or less, perhaps, Bastien will have rallied a dozen of his cutthroats. He will not lose a stone as big as a *demi-tasse*, you can believe it! Hurry, then—you must give it to me!"

Horace smiled at the girl's imperiousness. How sweet she was! A child in size, and not much more in years, with eyes as clear and unspoiled as if she did not, night after night, sing untranslatable songs to the ruff-raff of all nations in a third-rate dive. He wondered if she really understood the words herself.

A subtle perfume clung to her, brought out, perhaps, by the cool dampness on the Hill of the Martyr. One would naturally anticipate a powerful, exotic essence from a girl of the cabarets—something not merely arresting, but overcoming; but from Martine there stole the very breath of the shy places of the deep woods, where the little wild flowers lift their faces unafraid. She—

But Martine was speaking again—speaking vehemently, emphasizing her demands by stamping her ridiculous little high heels against the hard cobbles of the crooked old street.

"Give it me, *monsieur*! Now—before it is too late!"

Horace shook his head.

"If my life is in danger from having it in my pocket, then you are as good as dead if you carry it. If you think it prudent, we will return to the Golden Egg and send for a taxi-auto."

"But no—not there of all places! The room is full of Bastien's colleagues; and I do not propose to carry the diamond, me!"

He reluctantly delved into his pocket and handed it over. He was curious to see what

it was that she proposed to do. Intoxicated though he was by her mere presence, by the touch of her fingers on his arm, by the curious perfume that clothed her—the aroma of youth itself, perhaps—he was hard-headed enough to speculate on the possibility that she wished to win what Bastien had lost, and that she might, after all, be in league with the Apache. If so, she could not get far before Horace's long legs would overhaul her.

He watched her avidly.

What she did was the very last thing he could have anticipated. With quick, sure fingers she knotted the big stone in his handkerchief, which she did not even bother to ask for, but snatched from his coat pocket where a corner showed. Then, holding the cat gently between her knees, she wound the handkerchief closely but not too tightly about its skinny neck. Straightening up, and dropping the cat, she clapped her hands sharply and cried:

"Allons! Zut!"

As if shot from a gun, the animal disappeared into the mouth of the selfsame black alley down which Bastien had all but made his escape.

Horace cried out, but too late. There, to his firm belief, disappeared forever the great solitaire—forever so far as he was concerned; but Martine, with a sigh of relief, smiled brightly up into his face.

"V'là, monsieur! It is done."

"I am, at any rate," he grimaced.

Her eyes widened.

"Wait! I shall tell you, my friend! Mimi Pinson can find her way home from any quarter of our Paris, and on the blackest night."

"Even so, somebody will pick her up."

"Nobody can move fast enough," Martine insisted. "Of course," she shrugged, "life is life. She might get herself shot—but who would waste powder on a whiskerless cat? Paris is full of cats to be had for a dish of skim milk."

"But how do you know she will go home? Cats like to stay out till all hours."

Martine pouted, and hung her head.

"Ah, but, monsieur, Mimi Pinson has a little one at home, a very hungry kitten. As you can figure to yourself, she will hurry. There is a drainpipe by which she can climb to my window, which is left open. *Comme ça!*"

Dancing up and down, and pretending to haul herself up into the air by her little

hands, Martine gave so droll an imitation of a feline ascent of a gutter pipe that Horace laughed aloud, quite forgetting that his life was supposed to be in danger, and that he had just beheld a diamond which must be worth a great many thousand francs disappear down a pitch-black alley tied to a cat miles from home, for all he knew. But again, terror seized the *chanteuse*.

"Observe, monsieur! There—at the head of the street!"

His eyes strained into the darkness, at first seeing nothing. As he continued to stare, shadows moved, furtively, bodingly; and these presently crystallized into half a dozen crouching figures running humped up, infinitely sinister, with an apelike menace in their approach.

Looking the other way, as she whirled him about with astonishing strength, another little knot of black figurines detached itself from the obscurity, and moved to cut off their retreat back toward the Golden Egg, whose bloated sign, exuding a sickly yellow light, now filled him with repulsion.

He heard Martine suck in her breath with a shrill hiss. His own fists clenched, even as their futility smote him—when, with a roar that turned his heart to water, a throng of nondescript figures came pouring down a staircase before whose penthouse they stood, and overflowed onto the *pavé* with whoops and snatches of song and repartee.

In an instant he was in the midst of what appeared to be a throng of inmates escaped from a madhouse. He was swept onward, though he braced his feet and clutched wildly at the penthouse upright. Suddenly he observed his companion was clinging to one arm, her voice rising in joyous welcome to the outlandish chorus, her feet moving with theirs. Had she, too, gone mad? Was all the world mad on the Martyr's Hill, to which he had come, in a moment of weakness, from the staid security of his little hotel room?

"It is an affair extraordinary!" the little *chanteuse* was crying in his ear. "*Bonne chance*, is it not? Come then, *mon brave!* We are saved!"

It was three blocks farther along before Horace got even an inkling of what it was all about. Talking was none too easy in this bedlam. Only by broken sentences, fragments jerked from Martine's teeth as she was dragged wildly over cobblestones and around sharp corners, did he discover

that by rare fortune they had been swept up into a crowd of artists, who had been paying one of their periodical visits to their confreres, *les Montmartrois*.

These, it appeared, were true Bohemians—painters and their models; a budding dramatist or two, some fellows from the School of Law, and a pianist with dirty finger nails, and the madness of genius in his eyes. They had been making an evening of it, not at a vulgar cabaret—which most of them could ill afford—but in a big studio *sous les toits*, with their Montmartre hosts, drinking thin, sour wine and good sound Normandy cider, eating salads and little-cakes, smoking villainous tobacco, and releasing their complexes in innocent abandon and frank *camaraderie*. They were just boys and girls, with some few *anciens*, honest in their emotions, and real workers. For them conventions did not exist—only traditions. Not one of them was intoxicated or obscene; nor was one of them hampered by prudishness.

Now they were *en route* to their own Latin Quarter; and, by joining them, Horace and his little comrade would be not merely safe, but perfectly welcome. Already they had been tacitly accepted.

Horace had thrown an arm about Martine, the crush being so great that he feared that she might be torn away from him. His other arm was clutched fervently by an old fellow with floating white whiskers and a nose so alarmingly crimson that it almost served as a torch for their feet. Far ahead, some one had a tin flute. At his back a couple of guitars wept in a genteel, operatic sort of way, suggesting hopeless passion and rusty iron bars.

They swung, six abreast, spilling well out into the roadway, down the Rue de Clichy and across the Rue St. Lazare to the Chaussée d'Antin. As they entered the Rue Montmartre, they broke spontaneously into one of the medieval Latin students' songs—"Integer Vitæ."

The grim houses flung back the sonorous stanzas. From dark windows, nightcapped heads popped out to listen and approve. They passed St. Eustache, silent and aloof. Horace's mind swam in a sort of ecstasy. He was surrounded by a vibrant life that he had never known, and had become a part of it.

In the rank ahead a tall artist leaned down to kiss the ready lips of a little girl wearing *sabots* and a coarse, clean frock.

At Horace's left, Martine looked provocatively up, her head tilted back, her eyes smiling. He bent over, and their lips clung for a long moment, while the old man on his right clapped him on the back and heartened him in a cracked voice.

He was old Papa Poussin, the veteran said—a sculptor of parts, whose classicism was no longer popular in these days of cubists and vorticists. But what matter? Did he not earn a modest sum teaching drawing at the Beaux Arts? Was he not invited to every revel of the Rive Gauche, and held in affection by all these, his children?

His eyes moistened, his rubicund nose gleamed terrifyingly. Horace noted that his trousers were frayed, but he wore clean spats, and his frock coat, worn to the nap, was spotless.

For an instant a horrible vision came to the young American. It seemed to him that the street, on either hand, was lined with members of the faculty of Mansard, chilly, minatory, their noses lifted, their scornful eyes repudiating him. What was he, the taciturn professor of French, the bachelor with whose name no romance had ever been associated—much less any scandal—doing here in the night, his feet capering uncouthly, his lips still moist from a kiss that made his blood sing as from a draft of heady wine? But the thought vanished even as it formed.

The pedestrians paid no more attention to the paraders than to smile indulgently. There was nothing grotesque about their actions, in the eyes of the citizens. They belonged to Paris—old Paris, with its smiles and tears.

Presently they emerged into the region of the Halles Centrales. Here already the market gardeners were gathering, purveyors to the vast maw of Paris. There was a smell of damp straw and spicy apples, of garlic and cheese. Great Percheron horses munched from feed bags, and here and there a carter lay asleep beneath his wagon. A golden pyramid of cheeses was being laid by three uncannily spry old women. Butchers were setting their stalls, impaling their carcasses. Somewhere a cock crowed defiantly.

Before an aged dame, the students drew up. Three of them—painters who shared a studio—were bargaining for an enormous cheese. After a wordy battle they paid over sundry francs and sous and pink and blue scrip, and became the possessors of

an enormous Swiss cheese, the size of a cart wheel.

"Winter comes apace," declared their spokesman. "One must be prepared. With this emperor of all cheeses, we cannot starve! It is the concentrated nourishment of many flocks and herds."

A dark-haired young fellow stepped forth from the ranks. He suggested that when they bore this colossal prize past the Palais de Justice, agents of the Prefecture would be certain to interrogate them. Therefore he, Aristide Moulin, student of law, would draw up a receipt to be signed by *madame*, which they could show to the police.

Some one thrust a sketching pad into his hand. He set to work beneath a flambeau, and presently framed a pompous and highly technical instrument, conveying in full legal phraseology all title whatsoever in the purchase to the three students of art. This, amid laughter and jests, was signed by the old woman's crabbed fist, and sealed by a gob of tallow from a stump of candle that some one carried in his pocket, to light his way up innumerable flights.

The young lawyer then made an eloquent speech in honor of the transaction. His eyes glistened, perspiration bedewed his brow. Carters with smoking pipes gathered to listen approvingly. Horace felt that never had he listened to purer or more moving French idiom.

Abruptly, the peroration came; and then, the cheese being too heavy and bulky to carry, it was trundled along like a hoop. It was tough and resilient, and bounded absurdly from the uneven paving, but its cloth casing held firmly.

Through the Place du Châtelet, with the ancient Tour St. Jacques to their left, across the Île de la Cité—the Lutetia, which was an ancient city when Cæsar's legions invested it—over the Pont au Change and the Pont St. Michel, and so to the "Boul' Miche," the main thoroughfare of the Latin Quarter.

Here the company began to dissolve like a snowball in sunshine. Singly, by couples, in little groups, they broke away, to enter forbidding-looking alleys and *impasses*, where were their lofty studio homes. Almost as suddenly as this prodigious adventure had begun, it was over!

In less than an hour Horace had learned more of the real Paris than he had from all his reading and all his routine sight-seeing. For this brief moment he had merged into

its life stream. More—he had been permitted to step back into the Middle Ages.

Martine guided him to the left.

"Voici, chéri! It is here that I live."

They had come to the Rue Soufflot. All their companions had vanished. From the street they turned into a dark *cul-de-sac*, and presently stopped before a tall, shabby-looking, unlighted house.

Martine held his hand as they began to climb the steep, worn stairs. Each hall was dimly lighted by a single gas jet, turned low. At the second landing, he fancied that he heard stealthy steps behind them, and paused uncertainly, looking back over his shoulder. He could see nothing, and the sound—if sound it was—had ceased. They resumed their climb.

At the very top the girl unlocked a door made from a single heavy plank boldly carved by some forgotten hand. A breath of night air from an open window greeted them; but it was pitch dark within.

"Wait while I find a light," she whispered, leaving Horace just inside the door.

He heard the sound of a vesta, and presently the wick of a great candle caught flame. For an instant Martine stood bathed in the faint glow, like a vision surrounded by the black curtains of sleep. Then the flame steadied and increased, and the homely little cubicle was visible, with its low, sloping ceiling, a curtained bed, two or three cheerful oil sketches on the white walls—gifts of some artist—and, blinking serenely and singing drowsily upon a scrap of rug, Mimi Pinson, nursing a tiny replica of herself.

Even as they cried out in satisfaction to note that the cat still bore the handkerchief knotted about her neck, there came a strange diversion. From beneath a great black oak dresser scuttled a venturesome mouse. Instantly Mimi Pinson was afoot, leaving her unhappy offspring tumbled upon his back, his little pink tongue out, making futile sucking noises.

The terrified mouse darted toward Horace. Martine promptly climbed the nearest chair; and a second later the cat shot past, and out into the hall.

An old football instinct to "follow the ball" sent Horace lunging after, almost before the impulse had formulated itself. He leaped into the corridor, fetched staggeringly up against a dark figure lurking beyond the door, and was grasped in wiry arms. A desperate wrench brought them

crashing into the guard rail of the stairs. It yielded with a shrill protest, and down into the blackness they fell, locked together like a pair of snarling dogs.

Horace fell beneath, and a wave of nausea swept him as the back of his head rammed a stair tread. Half conscious, it seemed to him that the faint flicker of a knife blade menaced him from above; and then oblivion took him into her arms.

III

At first, upon opening his eyes, Horace fancied that the sharp gleam of a knife blade still played before them; but as his senses steadied, he recognized the infinitely more brilliant refugence of the great diamond solitaire. He was lying on his back upon a couch, his head softly pillowed, a soothing coolness binding his brow, the smilingly solicitous face of Martine bending low over him, the while she displayed the stone by the light of a great candle set upon a stand.

He sought to rise, but was prevented by a sense of giddiness, as well as by the girl's gently restraining hand.

"Repose thyself, *monsieur*," she urged. "Thy head still sings from thy hard fall."

"What happened?" he breathed, looking wonderingly about.

"That scélérat of a Bastien had followed us here! Did I not say that he would not easily give up this prize? But I was in time to stay his hand, and to speed him on his way with a hatpin. Mimi came back with her prey, and, what is better for us, with the jewel!"

Horace felt tenderly of his head. He had evidently escaped with nothing worse than a severe bump. Despite Martine's protests, he insisted upon sitting up, and after drinking a little glass of wine he was nearly himself once more.

"What shall we do?" he asked. "It will not be safe to leave the diamond here to-night. Ought I not to call a *sergent* and turn it over to him? And you—you must go to some hotel for the night. Bastien may come back, and with help."

Martine smiled slowly, and shook her head.

"Listen, *monsieur*. We have much to do to-night, you and I. First light your cigarette, and rest quietly on this old *chaise longue*, which may—who knows?—have sheltered the gracious Pompadour once upon a time; for I have a tale to relate."

Impatiently he allowed himself to be disposed upon the battered but once beautiful lounge chair, with a pillow at his neck, while the girl held before him a paper spill to light his cigarette.

Again her witching perfume stirred his pulse. Slender, soft, yet intensely vital, feminine to the last degree, but utterly fearless and resourceful, she troubled his spirit more than he liked to admit.

Again came the fleeting thought of his situation, as stated in terms of the Mansard College standard. The hour was hard upon midnight. The little chamber was intimate with the personality of the girl of the cabaret. The bed she slept in stood curtained in its corner, with an air of discreet expectancy. Her garments were flung upon chairs, or hung from hooks in a shallow closet, whose door stood half open. Upon the floor Mimi once more nursed her baby. And he—a professor who had met the rigid character tests demanded by the Mansard faculty—reclined upon his back, smoking lazily, an empty wineglass at his elbow, as if he belonged in the picture!

A flashlight of him would be enough. No defense, no alibi, would avail. He was not sure that he could frame one that would not sound absurd.

Had he not ventured out upon this, his last evening in Paris, he would have returned home with his notebooks filled with sedate observations, but his knowledge of the ancient city would have been little more than one can glean from attending an illustrated lecture, or pursuing a course of selected readings. He was expected to give a lecture before the students and the faculty—and the faculty's wives—upon "My Impressions of Europe," or something equally futile! And he could see himself upon the platform of their chapel back home, clearing his throat with a drink of water, and platitudinizing:

"There are, in Paris, certain cabarets and resorts patronized exclusively by tourists, who fondly imagine that in them they are beholding types of that underworld which exists solely in the imaginations of the writers of lurid fiction—"

But Martine was speaking. She sat disturbingly close to him, patting his hand from time to time, for emphasis. Her breath played warmly over his face as he listened.

"It is true, as *monsieur* has said, that the diamond must not remain here to-night.

It is I who shall tell you what we will do, you and I; but first, I tell you the truth. Me, I will not deceive you!"

She paused to trim the wick of the great candle. A strand of her hair, odorous, alive, caressed his cheek as she leaned across him. He stirred restlessly, his cigarette burning unheeded between finger and thumb.

"I am not French," Martine resumed. "I will not, if you please, reveal my true name. Enough that I was born with Romanoff blood in my veins. I was destined to have servants, my carriage, a little palace, a husband with many medals strung across his breast; but the fates decided otherwise. And so I am Martine, a singer at the Golden Egg—and worse places. I crave *monsieur's* sympathetic attention.

"This much I shall tell you. My uncle, Leonid Orlovski, was once—and not so many years ago—ambassador of Russia to France. He was unmarried, and I, his little niece, was his pet and favorite. Though unmarried, my uncle was a very human type, you can believe it! While he lived in great pomp at the embassy, he maintained another and more homelike establishment in a section of Paris where the utmost discretion prevails. He belonged, in short, in his hours of relaxation from the duties of state, to the Rue Marbeuf."

This allusion was intelligible to the listener. He knew that while there is a very real street of that name, it has become something more than a thoroughfare. It has acquired a symbolism.

In this, it has many exemplars. Every one can fashion a list for himself. "Wall Street decrees this or that," we say, intending to connote a financial system rather than a locality. In the same way, we familiarly refer to French and English politics as the machinations of the Quai d'Orsay and of Downing Street. The Gold Coast of San Francisco and the Bowery of New York had, in the old days, meanings apart from municipal topography; and when the wives of faculty members of Mansard speak of Fifth Avenue, they certainly forget that the name was, originally, a mere numeral.

Therefore Horace understood at once that Orlovski, the Russian ambassador, had an irregular household in the Rue Marbeuf, where frock-coated, silk-hatted gentlemen of the utmost importance passed one another without bowing, and where, amid an air of surreptitious reserve, beautifully

gowned ladies possessed everything their hearts could desire, save only a *name*.

Martine perceived that she need not enlarge upon her uncle's human frailty.

"All this was not so very long ago, you understand," she continued. "The terror which has swept the old Russia away is of yesterday. Most of those who knew my uncle are living. Many of them are still young. *Par exemple*—and this may surprise you—the blond girl at the Golden Egg, she who lost this diamond, was the very one who—"

Horace sat up as if galvanized.

"No! You don't mean—"

"But yes, *monsieur*! I know her, though she has no idea that I am anything but what I seem to be. She still lives in the pleasant realm of the Rue Marbeuf; for my uncle left to her the small but exquisite mansion in which, but a few years ago, he was found dead. It was his heart, *monsieur*—too susceptible, no doubt. The police, you may assure yourself, proved that his death was natural. There was no foul play. There were papers of state in his pocket, their seals unbroken. His money and rings were upon him.

"His body was secretly removed, at night, and the news given out that he had died respectably at the embassy. Few besides the police, his valet, and me—his niece—know the truth. He left me well provided for. I was his heiress, in truth; but, as *monsieur* well knows, great estates and castles and moneys in Russia melted away when the Bolsheviks arrived. From one of the wealthiest women of Paris—on paper—I became Martine, a *chanteuse*. All our family was wiped out; nor could my aristocratic friends help me. They had enough trouble to find bread for their own mouths!"

Martine lowered her voice, leaning closer to Horace. She glanced fearfully about, as if apprehensive of eavesdroppers.

"Once, when I was a young girl in a convent school, my uncle took me to this establishment of his." She put her fingers on Horace's mouth to still his instinctive protest. "Listen, *mon ami*—it was for a purpose. The girl, Anna Pignotti, was at Monte Carlo, and the house was quite empty. And my uncle showed me a secret cabinet, a cunning place hidden in the bookcase of a little *salle de réception*, which he had had made to hold certain private papers, as well as securities and gold and

even jewels. He told me that if ever harm befell him, I alone knew of this secret, and I must obtain the valuables and destroy the papers. The rest was all mine; for, as I have told you, he had made me his heiress."

"And you think that this girl, Anna Pignotti, has not found them—that they are still intact? Then why do you not go to the authorities and claim what is yours?"

Martine shook her head sadly.

"I am sure that the Pignotti has no suspicion of any secret hoard; but as for legal help, that is not to be thought of. My uncle having left the establishment to her, she would of course claim this as a part of it. Besides, it is highly important, both to the honor of my family and the future plans of the Romanoff party, that the papers should not fall into the hands of a *gamine* like her, especially since all her intimates are of the Lenine camp. It is almost equally to be desired that they should not be seen by the French police. It is necessary that I should obtain the box secretly. I have planned how to do this, many times, but without help I could not; so I waited. To-night, *monsieur, le bon Dieu* brought you, and pointed the way!"

Horace blinked.

"Me?" he asked feebly. "But how?"

"Simply enough, *mon brave!* It is the hour of fate. We have the great diamond of the Pignotti, given to her, very likely, by my poor uncle himself; and by returning it, to-night, before the police trace it here, I have at last the opportunity to enter the house on the Rue Marbeuf. So, if *monsieur's* head is restored, we will go there now, by taxi-auto, and win Anna's gratitude, and, if all goes well, recover my little inheritance!"

"But even so, even when we are admitted, what chance will you have to open a secret panel and make off with the contents? There is bound to be somebody about—if not Anna, then a servant."

"It is a chance," Martine admitted, "but it is our only one, and it is better than it sounds. I have told you that the secret cabinet is in the little reception hall, to which we, as visitors, are sure to be conducted. Once within, it will take me but an instant to get what I want. I know just where it is, and just how to open it. Anyhow, we must take what the gods send. Trust me to seize the opening, however slight, when it comes!"

Every instinct warned Horace to have nothing to do with the girl's project. He had nothing to win, everything to lose. He shuddered as he pictured the scene—a call paid to entire strangers, himself seated with a little cabaret singer, in a house where he had no business to be. The servant would depart to announce the arrival of visitors close on to midnight. For a brief instant, possibly, they would be alone, with Martine feverishly fiddling with a secret spring, the mechanism of which she might have forgotten, or which might stick from long disuse. Then the mistress of the house, or perhaps some male guest, or a sardonic manservant, would appear in the doorway. An alarm would be given, the police would arrive, and there would be nothing but the Arabian Nights story of a girl of no social standing whatever—her unsupported word—between the American and sheer ruin! His blood turned cold.

And yet against this there was the intangible but irresistible appeal of the girl herself. Horace felt that in her presence he could deny her nothing. By the crook of one of her soft little fingers, by the inflection of her mellow voice, by the perfume of her lovely body, she could lead him into wilder schemes than this, forlorn hope! Even as his hard common sense shrieked protest, he knew that he was lost.

There was one bright spot—he would at least get rid of that cursed diamond, the possession of which put their lives in the peril of the organized Apaches of Paris. And perhaps, once inside the house, they would not be ushered into that dangerous room at all; or, if so, they would not be left alone. In that case, they could leave without the secret box, but also with no reproach attaching to himself.

He sighed, and surrendered.

"I'm all right now," he said, rising to his feet. "And it is already late enough. Let's go!"

Martine cooed, and before he realized her intention she had thrown warm arms about his neck. Again, and on a lingering kiss, the professor's soul soared to the celestial spheres, no longer his well disciplined spirit, but the plaything of a girl whom he had known for less than two hours.

IV

HORACE felt rather futile as they rolled smoothly across the Pont de la Concorde. Martine had taken full charge of the ex-

pedition. Late as it was, there were plenty of taxis about, but, despite her hurry, she passed five before selecting a somewhat out-at-elbows machine with a chauffeur who looked as if he ought to be doing time. Once within, she became abstracted, and answered her companion irrelevantly or not at all. She seemed, indeed, if not cold, at least indifferent.

After proceeding about halfway up the Champs Élysées, their car turned into an elegantly demure little cross street, lined with small but obviously luxurious houses. Three or four blocks down, they were backed into a service alley barely wide enough to admit them. They came to a pause in partial darkness, with rows of wooden doors on either hand, opening into kitchen areas.

Martine seemed to awaken.

"We have arrived," she said simply.

For a moment Horace wondered if she had changed her plans, and proposed to effect a burglarious entrance from the servants' quarters; but after a few whispered words to the surly chauffeur she turned and led the way back to the little street, one of those parallel to their more famous sister, the Rue Marbeuf.

Wherever a window was lighted—and many were—shades were close drawn. The quarter seemed deserted, although behind them the lights of countless big cars flashed up and down the Champs Élysées. Not another word did Martine speak until, pausing before one of the smallest but most ornate *maisonnettes*, rather Byzantine in its style, she whispered:

"And this is the house!"

Horace scanned its façade. A light glowed over the door, but all the windows were dark, save two on the third floor. Martine, too, had noted this, and it seemed to lighten her abstraction.

"They do not entertain downstairs. That means that our chances are good," she asserted.

Horace understood her. Provided they were shown into the reception room, a little respite must ensue ere any one came below to inquire as to their errand at such an hour; but would they succeed in getting inside the door, until scrutinized by the Pignotti woman?

So far as he was concerned, it would have pleased him better to see the place lighted up like a Christmas tree, with jazz music bursting from every opening. Not that he

didn't wish to see Martine get her box; but he had never been able to share her optimism. One didn't thus easily enter strange houses and walk out of them with gold and jewels and valuable papers—not in real life, anyhow.

An enormous footman answered their ring—a man not as tall as Horace, but broad almost to the point of deformity. His shoulders rubbed against the lintels on either hand as he stood, obsequious yet somehow hostile, as one accustomed to pass upon strange visitors, to admit some with alacrity, and to kick others as far as the avenue—or farther.

"*Monsieur desire*—" he purred.

"I regret that I have no card," the American answered in French, as the girl had instructed him. "Be so good as to inform Mme. Pignotti that I have come to return her diamond."

The fellow was for once taken aback. He drew in his breath with an astonished hiss. Then, recovering himself, he stepped aside for them to enter. Five seconds later he was holding back a heavy portière and indicating a tiny room at the right, at the same time flooding it with light.

"If *monsieur* and *madame* will give themselves the trouble to seat themselves?"

They did so, and in a moment they heard the footsteps of the serving man rapidly and lightly ascending the wide stairs that swept up from the entrance hall.

Martine rose from the ivory and mother-of-pearl chair into which she had indolently sunk. Her eyes blazed with excitement. She wasted no time in words, but swept Horace with a triumphant glance as she fairly leaped toward the farther end of the little room.

Here was a built-in bookcase of some half a dozen shelves. The volumes were elaborately bound and tooled, a trifle dusty, looking as if nobody had disturbed them of late, not even a maid with feather brush.

It could not have been more than ten seconds after the servant had left before Martine had wrenched at the second shelf, swinging it out from the wall. Thrusting her arm into the space left, her fingers quested nervously, while a little frown corrugated her brow.

To Horace the situation was ghastly with portent. Every instant he expected to hear steps descending the stairs, or shuffling up the hall. The room seemed full of unseen eyes and straining ears.

His own senses were abnormally acute. For the first time he noted the ticking of a clock somewhere in another room. He even heard his own watch, and marveled at the amount of noise it made. His nostrils quivered to a new odor—some fervent scent based on musk. It had probably been left by the Pignotti.

His eyes caught a cobweb in the corner of the ceiling, where squatted a little drab spider, while a green bug moved erratically toward it. From time to time the insect would pause, as if considering. Then it would move on an inch. To Horace, it symbolized in some queer way his own situation. If the green bug became enmeshed, and fell a prey to that sinister drab killer, it would mean that he, too, Horace Barnes, was lost; but so long as the bug was immune, so was he!

With anguish he watched it rather than the patient search of Martine's fingers. The little insect touched the outer strand of the web. It quivered, but the spider did not move. Not yet—not until the victim had utterly compromised itself!

A gasp recalled him from his absurd studies in natural history. Martine had faced about, her sleeve black with dust, her lips parted, one hand outstretched and clutching a small, thin, black japanned box, such as one sees in safe-deposit vaults. Simultaneously there was born in her eyes a look of mingled cupidity and terror; and at Horace's left, a shrill voice cried:

"Mikhail!"

The girl Anna stood in the doorway, her eyes dilated, her nostrils pinched. She seemed utterly astonished. It occurred to Horace that she might have stood there unobserved for some time before she had thought to call for help.

Well, the worst had happened! He crushed down an insane impulse to look up and see whether the little green bug was already in the clutch of the drab spider; and then Martine flashed past him, almost upsetting him, as he struggled up from his chair.

The *chanteuse* held her precious box under her left arm. With the other, she seized Anna's frock at the neck, ripping it almost in one piece from her plump shoulders, dragging her about sidewise, and then sending her with a violent thrust back into the hall. There she reeled three or four steps and collapsed upon the stairs, down which she must have just come, though

neither of them had heard her. There followed the rasp of the great front door, and Martine dashed out of the house.

As Horace darted into the hall, it was empty; but before he could escape, the footman appeared from another room across the hall. The big man's eyes seemed to take in everything at a raking glance—his mistress lying disheveled upon the lower stair, Horace himself in evident flight, the door left wide open by Martine. Heavy as he was, he was not slow; and he instantly blocked the exit with his great body, thrusting out enormous hands covered to the finger tips with black hair.

Already in motion, Horace did not check. As he had done hundreds of times on freezing November fields, he dropped his head and leaped forward like a battering ram. Thus, as a tackle, he had been used to head the interference; but now, all rules being suspended, he threw up his elbow, driving its sharp, bony point into Mikhail's midriff.

With a sound like that of a deflating tire, the great mass of bone and flesh toppled down, carrying Horace beneath it; but the wind was driven completely from the servant's body, and he could do nothing hostile until he got it back. Grabbing his hat—even in his excitement he retained the instinct to leave no incriminating evidence behind him—the American crashed out of the doorway, down the steps, and into the night.

Martine was not in sight. Already she must have gained the little service alley where their taxi-auto was parked. Horace sped down the street toward it, conscious that he was, in the eyes of the law, neither more nor less than a thief fleeing from the scene of his crime.

Fortunately, on this quiet street, he was practically unobserved. An aged telegraph messenger had alighted from his bicycle, and paused momentarily to stare at the foreigner with vacuous eyes. Horace could see the dispatch dangling limply from one hand as he went past.

Then, with a jangle of gears and a violent cough, the taxi-auto got under way. It shot out of the alley just ahead, went into full speed, and disappeared.

From the house behind came the drumming of feet and a hoarse cry. Without turning around to look, Horace kept on and rounded into the Champs Élysées. There was no further sign of pursuit, and he slowed down to a walk.

The clocks were striking two when he passed the sleepy *portier* of his little hotel on the Rue Duphot. He was wringing wet with perspiration, and nerve-racked with the constant fear of feeling upon his shoulder the arresting hand of the law. He could not blame Martine for not waiting for him, considering the vital need she had of escaping with her treasure; but he felt a little hurt that she had not looked back to see if he, too, had made his get-away.

In his dreams he was taking her home as his bride to Mansard, and she was blithely crossing its campus, a cigarette jauntily stuck between her red lips. Even members of the faculty were not permitted to smoke on the campus. There was no rule as to the use of tobacco by their wives, because such a possibility had never occurred to Mansard; but the professor of geology had lost his twenty-year position when his wife won an atrocious silver-plated water pitcher at a bridge tournament. In Horace's dreams, she gibbered at Martine, and the dean came to him as man to man and advised him to commit suicide.

V

It was nearly ten o'clock when he awoke, unrefreshed, and with a bewildered uncertainty as to whether the events of the hectic night before had not all been part of some nightmare. This was the morning, he reflected, that was to have seen him upon his way to London. His bag, ready packed save for a few last toilet accessories, stood upon the table.

It was not of London that he thought as he dressed, but rather of the little singing girl, whom he must see as soon as possible. His heart sank as he pictured her already a possible prisoner, her tiny attic chamber inhabited solely by the wondering Mimi and her kitten.

He descended to the empty dining room for *déjeuner à la fourchette*. The exertions and anxieties of the previous night had at least left him with a healthy American appetite.

He was already attacking his second egg when the waiter brought him a card engraved with the name "M. Arnault Lapierre," with the words "Service de l'Identité Judiciaire" in the lower left-hand corner.

"He is very anxious to see *monsieur* at once," the *garçon* said.

Horace turned pale. So the police had

tracked him down, just as he fancied all was well!

He bade the waiter show M. Lapierre in, and resumed the eating of his egg, for which all appetite was gone.

The man who presently followed the waiter to his table was not one whom Horace would have associated with criminal investigations. He was a small, elderly gentleman, dressed in old-fashioned style, and with mild, almost vacant brown eyes. He might have been a collector of rare butterflies or odd volumes; but—a detective!

Horace rose punctiliously.

"Will M. Lapierre perhaps join me?" he asked, trying to appear casual.

The visitor had, it appeared, breakfasted long since, but he would, with permission, seat himself and—if it was not objectionable—indulge himself by smoking while Mr. Barnes finished his repast.

"I felt that it would perhaps be pleasanter to talk here than at the Prefecture," Lapierre explained.

Horace swallowed hard.

"Wha-what was it y-you want to know?" he gulped.

The little man did not instantly reply. His mild eyes wandered about the drab, uninteresting room with the gentle curiosity of a child. He drew a paper packet from his pocket, and selected a thin, black cigar, which he lighted with care. A villainous smoke curled up as he leaned back.

"I have understood that *monsieur* is leaving our city this morning?" he inquired, when the cigar was drawing freely.

"I—why, I did think of going—at least, before long."

Lapierre nodded.

"The fact must excuse this so unreasonable call."

Horace was alarmed by the strange manners of the little man. Not thus had the limbs of the law acted in such fiction as he had read. They bullied, they browbeat, or else they wormed their way into their victims' confidence. He waited apprehensively for Lapierre to go on.

"I am, *monsieur*, as you doubtless understand, a *mouche*—what you in your droll idiom call a 'fly cop'; but I am not at all mysterious. To prove this, allow me to lay all my cards upon the table. First, let me say that you puzzle me greatly. I find myself intrigued. It must be that I grow old, and inquisitive, and garrulous. Also, my mind falters, and I can no longer

rely upon my imagination, as of old. Things that once I flatter myself would have been clear now involve me in vague doubts.

"You, *monsieur*, are registered as a professor of our noble tongue in your own country. You come to Paris, and lead an exemplary, even a monastic, life. You honor our great national monuments with sympathetic study. You spend much time in our justly admired museums and galleries. During the evenings, you remain in your room, hard at work. You do not sally forth at night, with a guide, to amuse yourself with the more bizarre, *risqué* frivolities spread for the young visitor's enjoyment—and his francs."

Lapierre had been gazing fixedly at the tablecloth, at a spot where it had been mended with that miraculous neatness which is a secret of the French seamstress. Suddenly he raised his eyes and looked into the American's.

"Last night, contrary to your custom, you emerge from your solitary vigils. Even so, you have no secret *liaison*, you do not seek out any of the more questionable haunts beloved of tourists. You merely select one of our Montmartre cabarets, and there, alone, you dine and look on. Presently, at a table close to yours, a clever theft perpetrates itself. A valuable diamond disappears as by magic. The police are called, and search is made, but in vain. Thereupon the victim and her escort leave.

"Up to this point, *monsieur* has been merely an interested observer; but now, with one Bastien sitting alone at the table, you prove yourself to be both acute and resolute. It is your eyes which penetrate the ingenious manner in which the diamond has been hidden. Why, then, did not our agent discover it, you perhaps ask? *Hélas!* It is for such reasons that the good fellow will always be a *sergent de ville*, and never a *flic*. Although the stratagem was not original, your own admirable Poe having indeed set forth the theory of hiding a thing in a place so obvious that no one shall dream of looking for it there, our honest fellow overlooked it. But not *monsieur!* He it is who first proves to himself that Bastien is the thief, and then follows him outside and bravely forces him to give up his spoil.

"Then Mlle. Martine, who also has a pair of bright eyes, follows *monsieur* outside, and conceives a brilliant method of insuring

the safe delivery of this so valuable jewel to her apartment. It succeeds; and later this same evening—at about midnight, to be exact—*monsieur* and his little new-found friend set forth to return the stone to its proper owner. A memorable evening, truly, but not yet come to its end. They do indeed return the stolen jewel, but then, with a mysterious packet which they certainly did not fetch with them, they leave in a—what shall I say?—a most agitated manner. Once outside they separate, and return to their respective homes. Have I been accurate, M. Barnes?"

"So much so," admitted Horace, "that I do not see what there is that I can possibly add. You know as much as I do—possibly more!"

The little man removed his thin black cigar, and bowed deeply.

"*Monsieur est trop flatteur*," he protested. "He does my old wits too much honor. All that I have related was easy enough to learn, but I am still in the dark. What intrigues me, I confess it with humiliation, is this—by what means did the charming *mademoiselle* induce *monsieur* to collaborate with her in this singular adventure, seemingly so foreign to the ways of a studious professor?"

"Oh, that is easily explained. You see, that little box you mention contained things that don't belong to the residents at all. They are Martine's."

"You amuse yourself with me," complained Lapierre. "I beg of you to take pity on my bewilderment."

As completely as he could recall it, Horace related the story of Leonid Orlovski, the Russian ambassador, and the secret hiding place that he had shown to his niece, Martine.

"As a member of the detective bureau, you will probably recall his death in that house," he concluded.

For a long time Lapierre smoked in silence. When he spoke, his words seemed at first irrelevant.

"M. Barnes, were I to live my life over again, with free choice as to vocation, I would ask only to be a detective, and to live in Paris. The criminals of your great America are marked by a courage mounting to bravado. They choose high noon for their *coups*. Their ideas are vast, like those of your statesmen and financiers. They scorn little pickings. When they operate, it is against a noted jeweler on Fifth Ave-

nue, with his shop thronged with armed watchmen, or against trust companies strong as fortresses. The British crook is celebrated for his tenacity. Once on the scent of game, he never lets up until he either succeeds or lands in prison. He is stubborn, like the bulldog; but our Apaches, *monsieur*, possess that beautiful imagination, that artistic conception of their—their chosen careers—that makes of crime a thing to engage the admiration of poets.

"Last night proves my contention. Behold the brilliant scheme which must instantly have flashed into the mind of Bastien—himself only a poor camp follower! And now the tale of *mademoiselle*, so perfect, so balanced, that *monsieur* accepts it without question! It is flawless, marked by all the dramatic touches of a great actress—nay, a novelist."

"You mean," Horace faltered, "that—it isn't true—all this about her uncle—"

Lapierre interrupted with a wave of his thin cigar.

"All great art is true," he said with simple nobility. "Do not the three immortal musketeers of our Dumas walk the streets of old Paris as truly as the courtiers of history do? Are not the heroes of the great Hugo as real to-day as when they stepped from his vivid pages? In this sense, the story of *mademoiselle* may be said to be true; but otherwise, it has no basis in homely fact. I, Lapierre, knew Leonid Orlovski well. He was of reverend years. What he may have been in his undisciplined youth, I know not. He presumably had his little indiscretions, for he was a man; but he was never connected in any way with the Rue Marbeuf. As ambassador for Russia, he was discreet and even austere. And in his day, the little Martine was a precocious *gamine* on the water front of Marseilles, the pet of seafaring men of all nations. Understand me, *monsieur*—she was, and I believe is, a virtuous girl. She was also wise. She might easily have become a prominent member of the society of the Rue Marbeuf, had she been otherwise. As it was, she laughed at the millionaires; but certainly she is an Apache."

Horace cried out in protest.

"But, M. Lapierre, it was she who assisted me in rescuing the stolen diamond from Bastien, and who later on insisted upon returning it to its owner!"

"*Parfaitement!* Monsieur is thinking of

the Apaches as an organized society, with their rulers, and their inviolable laws. In truth, they are held together solely by their unanimous hostility to capitalism and established law. Their world reeks with petty jealousies. Here and there an Apache more daring or more intelligent than his fellows gains a following of sorts, and for a time. *Mademoiselle* grasped the chance to despoil the contemptible Bastien. And then, a more brilliant *coup* occurring to her, like a true sport she gave up the diamond to make a richer haul. I would give much to know just when this veracious fable entered her pretty head. Was it during your return with the Bohemians? Or, perhaps, while you lay briefly stunned by the fall downstairs?"

Horace could derive no pleasure from such speculations. He was still stunned by the realization that Martine was a crook, no whit better—to put it harshly—than Bastien himself; and that she—and he—were now in common case, collaborating thieves, and doubtless doomed to stand trial in the same dock!

Lapierre smiled faintly.

"*Monsieur* distresses himself," he said. "I assure him that the police of Paris have no designs upon him, or upon the delightful *enfant terrible* of whom he is thinking."

"But—but the box—the box that she sto—took from Mme. Pignotti?"

"That does not concern us. We have no official knowledge of any theft. No complaint has been entered, or will be entered. I must tell you that the Pignotti and her fellows belong to a dangerous band of propagandists, communists, and the like, who have given us much concern. They have been under constant espionage. It is possible that *monsieur*, in his hurried exit, yet found time to note one who bore a telegram, and who paused beside his bicycle—"

"That was you?"

The little man bowed, and reached into a coat pocket.

"And this," he said, producing a small sheet of blank paper, "this is the dispatch I carried."

"But what was in that box?"

Lapierre shrugged.

"I confess to a lively desire to know that myself; but, unfortunately, it has left the country. Valuables, no doubt, but especially secret papers which would be very informative as to the plans of the Pignotti gang. *Mademoiselle* gave them into other

hands last night, to be smuggled out of France."

Horace pondered.

"I wonder how she knew about the hiding place!"

"One can but guess, *monsieur*. Let us assume that the Apaches had learned of it, probably through some inmate of the household. A month ago there was discharged a servant, an old *récidiviste* who has served many terms, and who is in touch with the criminal element of Paris. Martine learned of plans to rob the house; and when the chance to gain admission arose, she instantly decided to—how do you Americans say?—beat them to it."

"But even so, considering the risk, was not the solitaire more valuable than anything she could hope to find in the box?"

"Priceless, without doubt; but, for that very reason, most difficult to dispose of. It would have to be cut up into smaller stones, and sold at a fraction of its worth."

For some time they sat in silence, Horace sipping the last of his coffee, the little Frenchman placidly smoking. Suddenly a thought came to the American.

"You say the box has left the country. Where, then, is Martine?"

"That I cannot say," admitted Lapierre. "When I called this morning, she was packing her effects, including a cat and kitten in a wicker basket. She would not tell me her plans, though she frankly enlightened me as to many points. I will confess that it relieves me to know that she is leaving Paris, for she is a disturbing element. We always prefer to have such make their adieus, and save the expense and trouble of a court trial."

"But she sent me no message?"

Lapierre once more delved into a pocket. This time he produced a little scrap of paper many times folded, which he handed over to Horace.

"She had tacked this to her door, presuming that you would call. I offered to deliver it in person. *Monsieur* will have formed his own ideas of the methods of detectives, and it is probably useless for me to assure him that I have not read it, though I confess to a lively interest."

Horace clumsily unfolded the paper, and eagerly scanned its brief line. It contained but two words, in fact—"Polti's, Soho."

He handed the paper back to the detective, his eyes questioning.

"I can make nothing of it," he admitted. "Is it a cipher?"

Lapierre chuckled.

"Nothing so engaging, M. Barnes! Soho is a region of London not unlike our Montmartre, though, if I may be permitted to say so, lacking its verve and sparkle. It is, in short, the district of expatriates in the British capital; and there Polti conducts a little restaurant whose cuisine is well spoken of by our French exiles."

The eyes of the American lightened, his features relaxed.

"And is there anything to prevent me from leaving Paris, M. Lapierre—from leaving immediately?"

"No, *monsieur*. It is even what I should advise. For observe, my friend, the unhappy situation in which you have been placed. You are the subject of interest to the Prefecture—not, you will understand, of suspicion, but merely of interest. The Apaches do not love you. Leagued with *mademoiselle*, you have deprived them of a wonderful solitaire, and forestalled their intended raid upon Mme. Pignotti. Finally, her group will hold you in almost equal detestation. In short, were you to honor us by a further residence, we should feel it our duty to provide you with a strong bodyguard, night and day. Frankly, in Paris, your life is in great danger."

Lapierre rose, flicked the ash from his thin cigar, and prepared to make his adieu. After bowing formally, and then accepting Horace's proffered hand with simple friendliness, he paused ere turning away. He leaned confidentially over the table, his voice sinking to a whisper.

"Advice from an old man is seldom acceptable to a young one. Terse as is the little billet from *mademoiselle*, it is full of meaning. She has, I believe, no lover. *Monsieur* is young and personable. He has ingratiated himself with the little lady; and yet"—Lapierre closed his eyes—"and yet may I say, as a final word, that without in any way casting aspersions upon the establishment of M. Polti, there are in London many restaurants where the food is equally good and the surroundings more—how shall I say it?—more *tranquillizing*?"

With which, the agreeable M. Lapierre bowed once more, and sauntered from the room, his eyes bent thoughtfully upon the floor, the thin, black cigar hanging, unlighted, from his lips.

THE END

Suspicion

THE STORY OF A FALSE ACCUSATION

By Reita Lambert

RICHARD SELLS let himself into the dimly lighted hall of his Madison Avenue house, closed the heavy doors behind him, and stood for a moment in a listening attitude. Silence greeted him—silence hemmed in by the muffled rumble of the city, and by a blur of voices from the servants' quarters downstairs.

As he started up the broad staircase, the deep, musical voice of the library clock spoke. Midnight!

The house was an old one, with the mellow dignity of mid-Victorianism still lurking obstinately about the ornate moldings, the mahogany newel posts, and the marble mantels. With these Della's ingenuity had been powerless to cope—with these, and with Richard's own apartment on the second floor, though her polychromatic modernism flaunted itself from every nook and corner of the old house.

He found the amber wall lights in his sitting room glowing softly on the richly tooled volumes that lined the walls, and on the sedate old walnut furniture. With a repressed, methodical precision, he slipped into a dressing gown, lit a cigarette, and tapped lightly on his wife's door before opening it.

Here also a light was burning, striving to penetrate a china damsel's voluminous silk and lace petticoat, beneath which it was imprisoned. His glance swept the room, while a slow, sardonic smile twitched at his lips.

How easy it was to appraise and label Della, simply by entering her room! Originally one of those austere chambers of an equally austere era, only the severe white marble mantel now remained from that discreet day. Precise and immaculate, with its prim, pursed grate, it appeared to gaze out in horrified wonder upon the tufted and lurid accouterment of the room.

The dressing table, laden with all the subtle and mysterious accessories of a fashionable woman's toilet; the rococo Louis Quinze bedstead and chairs; the inlaid cigarette box; the impalpable gown and negligee draped across the bed, and the small, rose silk mules beneath; the faint odor of exotic scent that seemed to exude from all the gaudy trifles strewn so carelessly about the room—all this was Della.

As he looked, Richard was assailed by a guilty unease, the unease of a man who gazes upon a sleeping friend—sleeping, and unaware that he is being observed. For Della's gods played her false. Her tale was here, writ large and clear for prying eyes—the tale of petty vanities, feverish gayeties, and empty days crowded full but still ringing hollowly.

He sighed and eased himself into a chair. He was a tall man, with long feet and hands, and a lean, ascetic face prematurely ruttled by weariness and frustration. He settled himself with the composure that was habitual to him—not so much composure, perhaps, as tenacious repression.

It was after two o'clock before his wife came, preceded by the cough of a fretful motor under the window and by the shrill of high, gay voices that echoed up and down the street. Then he heard the reverberation of the front door and light, quick footsteps along the hall.

"Well, for the love of Pete! I was all tuned up for a scream."

She paused in the doorway as he rose to his feet, with a small, bejeweled hand placed dramatically over her heart.

"I didn't intend to frighten you, my dear."

"Well, you know what some one once said about good intentions, Dicky!"

She was shrugging off her wrap as she came in. Now she flung it on the nearest

chair, scuffed off her pumps, and strolled across to the cigarettes.

"Lord, I'm dead!" she said, and lit the cigarette nervously. "And that pathetic stuff the Osburnes serve in lieu of booze!"

She flung herself on the *chaise longue* with a deep sigh that brought a heavy cloud of smoke with it. She was slender, sinuous, glittering.

"Well, you haven't honored me thusly just to give me the once over, Dicky, have you? Of course I'm delighted, but—"

"No," he said slowly, and fumbled in the pocket of his dressing gown. "No, Della—I wanted to speak with you—alone. This appears to be the only time I can achieve that privilege."

She yawned elaborately.

"Won't it keep?"

"No."

"Br-r!"

She affected a shiver. Her husband's eyes rested speculatively upon her as he drew a crumpled newspaper clipping from his pocket.

Not for a moment did she discard her pose, her pretension of airy nonchalance, of coy archness. Many bangles, jingling on her wrists, caught and reflected the light from the floor lamp at her head. The diamonds on her slender fingers gave forth a prismatic iridescence. Fatigue had drained the natural color from her cheeks, and her rouge stood forth in vivid splashes. Though her position was one of weary relaxation, she did not suggest repose. Her figure seemed to be in a constant eruption of nervous, futile movement.

"I cut this out of the *Times* this morning," said Richard quietly, "after my attention had been drawn to it at the club."

She took the clipping, glanced at it, and handed it back to him with a sharp giggle.

"Well, what of it? I took my lecture and paid my fine. This darned country is so cluttered up with traffic rules and regulations, it's a wonder to me that half the people who drive cars aren't in jail! I've got most of the cops fixed, but this one was new. Anyway, I was only going about forty."

"Is that all you see in this clipping, Della?"

"What else is there to see?" she asked irritably. "I tell you I paid my fine."

His nostrils dilated, and the hand that held the clipping was trembling, but he spoke steadily enough.

"That's the least of it, Della. You were arrested for speeding—"

"I tell you I wasn't going more than forty, and these damned officious cops—"

"At two o'clock yesterday morning," continued her husband, "in the company of one of the most worthless and vicious men in New York."

"Oh, Hal's not so vicious when you know how to pet him!"

"His reputation is vicious."

"Oh, Lord, I get you, Dicky!"

"And it is printed here"—he tapped the clipping with a long forefinger—"for all the world to see—your name and his! Mrs. Richard Sells—Hal Dubose—two o'clock in the morning!"

"Well, what of it?"

Her voice was mutinous now.

"Can you ask?"

"I can, but that's only half of it, deary. Will you answer?"

"That is precisely why I am here. It isn't the first time you've broken into print along with some bouncer."

"Well, I've got to have some one to play with, haven't I? God knows you're a total loss in that respect!"

"Then I must insist that you choose your playmates with a little more consideration for me—for my name."

She giggled delightedly.

"Light is breaking!" she cried. "Dicky's pride is hurt. He doesn't care what I do, so long as I don't break into print doing it! Oh, my dear, you are a fraud!"

He took a step toward her. For an instant fear wiped the insolent smile from her lips and arched the clipped brows over her cynical blue eyes. For an instant he towered over her, the flapping folds of his dressing gown accentuating his height, his lips drawn tightly over his clenched teeth.

"You're going a little too far, Della. Do you think it fair to abuse your position in this way? I've given you your head—"

"But you're keeping tight hold on the reins, I notice."

"You bear my name."

"Ah, that's it!" She blew a smoke ring expertly. "Now we're coming to the point! I'm a modest creature, you see, else I might think you jealous."

He smiled bitterly.

"I wish to God I were!"

"How silly, Dicky! To be jealous one must be maudlinly in love. To be in love is aging. It isn't worth the tears and wrin-

kles. Go along to bed, man, and I'll give your remarks due consideration."

He went back to the tufted pink chair and sank into it.

"I'm not going to bed, my dear, until I know what you're going to do."

"Do? Good gracious, how energetic you sound! I'm going to bed, of course, if you ever give me the chance."

"I don't mean *now*, Della, as you very well know. What are we going to do—about all this? We can't go on."

"The pronoun's plural. Speak for yourself, my good husband. What do you mean, we can't go on?"

Her levity, as always, seemed to make her impregnable, but he still held to his purpose.

"I, for one, can't go on like this," he said quietly. "Can you face it—endlessly? Is this your conception of marriage?"

"Why not?"

"Are you happy, Della?"

"S'pose so. I hadn't considered it."

He leaned toward her earnestly.

"You're not conscious of any lack? Are you, *can* you be, satisfied?"

"For the love of Pete, what is this—a revival meeting? First thing you know I'll be rising to testify!"

"Good God! Can't you be real? Are you a woman, or the empty shell you pretend to be? Are you devoid of all decent emotions?"

"Sounds like Edison's questionnaire," she said coolly. "Emotions are wearing. I don't keep 'em in my back yard. Aren't you ashamed to rant and tear like this all because of that damned cop and a newspaper clipping?"

"And can you see no farther back than that? Can it be possible that you are so blind? Do you think these ten miserable years have had nothing to do with it?" It seemed as if the pressure of his self-control would strangle him. "Is this sordid contention the paltry sum of marriage?"

"Well, what did you expect of marriage, dear man?"

"An occasional taste of happiness—a real home—a wife—children."

"Bourgeois ambitions, my dear, I must say! Besides, they went out with leg-of-mutton sleeves."

"Do you believe that, Della?"

"I know it! You're archaic, Dicky. What's that one about trying to reach a star? Don't you know by this time that

it can't be done?" She gave him a hard, lazy smile. "Trouble with you, Dicky, you're trying to get more out of life than there is in it."

Her husband slumped back in his chair, while the smart truism edged its way into his consciousness.

"You're making a heap of misery for yourself, Dick," she said easily. "You don't expect me to sit by the fire and mend your socks while you read 'Little Dorrit' to me, do you?"

"No," he said quietly. "No, I don't expect that of you, Della—not any more—no more than you expect me to mingle with your—your—"

"My kennel of jazz hounds, eh?" supplied Della. "No, you're right. I leave you to moon and aspire by your lonesome. All I ask in return is that you should grant me the same latitude."

"And that is your idea of a happy marriage?" He held her gaze with narrowed, bitter eyes. "I should call the arrangement a vulgar farce."

"Aren't the two words synonymous, Dicky?" At his gesture of revulsion her lips curled. "Look here, did you come in here to-night to point the way to the nearest exit?"

"Do you see any good reasons for keeping on like this?"

"Oh, then you did!" she sneered. "This way out, eh? You *are* a chivalrous soul! But it isn't so simple as all that, Dicky. I know a thousand reasons for keeping on like this, as you put it." Her voice rose. "You are getting on my nerves, always clogging the works with your silly sob stuff just when they're running smoothly. Why can't you be a decent sport and take your medicine? Half the men in our set—"

"Your set!"

"Well, my set, then, would give their contraband liquor to be in your shoes, and to have a wife who never asks questions or complains! You know I don't butt in on your affairs, or pull any Billy Sunday stuff on you. If ours isn't an ideal marriage, I'd like to see one!" She leaned back and reached for another cigarette. "It suits me well enough."

"You prefer this to your freedom?"

"Wouldn't know what to do with my freedom, as you call it, if I got it. Besides"—she grinned maliciously—"I'd lose the prestige that accrues to a married lady. If you had sense enough to count your

blessings, you'd settle down and enjoy yourself. You want marriage to be as it is in the goody movies—all love and kisses and baby clothes. Don't you see, that's why it is like that in the movies, because it's so novel?"

"You think so?"

"I know so! That kind of a marriage was dry rot. Why don't you jazz yourself up a bit? You're out of step, old chap!"

He got slowly to his feet.

"One would think you wanted to get rid of me in order to go and do it all over again," hazarded Della sagely. "You'd only pull another bonehead play if you did it. You'd find that nobody wants to waltz these days, Dicky. You have to learn to toddle, if you want to keep step with the gang."

"I have no such ambition," he said dully.

"Well, then, quit spoiling my party. What you need is a little lubrication, so why not try a high ball? I'll mix you one."

"No, thanks! If I were you, I should slow up on the high balls, Della. Your pace will kill you—high balls—speeding—"

"Don't you believe it," she replied. "Speed has nothing to do with it. A caterpillar may be slow, but he's likely to get stepped on, you know. I'd rather be at the wheel, going sixty, than be the poor devil in the middle of the road!"

Richard moved toward the door, and a chilly desolation went with him. He knew quite well that her assumption of indifference was the result of cool calculation. Behind that metallic cloak of cynicism she took refuge from his abortive protests.

He paused at the door, and turned back to her.

"About this Dubose boulder—will you be careful to see that his name is not linked publicly with yours again?"

"I'll do my darnedest, old thing. Nighty night!"

"I think I shall be leaving town in a day or so, Della."

"Leaving town? Where are you bound?"

"I'm not certain where I shall go."

"But it's nearly time to open the house at East Hampton. What shall I do about that?"

"Anything you please."

She sprang up and came toward him with repressed eagerness, her stockinged feet padding softly over the rugs, the gleam-

ing silver of her gown trailing after her, her cigarette hanging from her limp, white fingers.

"Then I won't bother about it, if you're not going to come down. The place bores me insufferably, anyhow." Her eyes were very bright. "Fay Denny and some of her bunch are sailing for France in a week or so, Dicky. Suppose I join the parade?"

He nodded absently.

"Very well," he said. "I'll see that your account is kept in order."

"Oh, goody!" she rejoiced. "I've been dying of inanition lately. This darned town is as dull as a bad musical comedy. You're a duck!"

She flung her arms about his neck. He was conscious of her lips pressed fleetingly against his cheek, and of the agglomerate odors of a heady perfume and tobacco in his nostrils.

"Wish you luck, Dicky!"

Once in his room, back in the reassuring presence of his books and worn, substantial chairs, he stood aware, as always, that her blasé sophistries had left their noxious trail across his spirits.

"You're trying to get more out of life than there is in it, Dicky!"

It was a clever phrase—the sort of thing for which she had a diabolical aptitude; but was it true? Was all love either carnal or mercenary? Was virtue nothing more than discretion? Was marriage merely a convenient cloak to shield the baser passions and rob them of their social penalties?

Doubts assailed him, crowding in darkly upon his bleak lethargy; and at last they stung into sudden revolt the emaciated shadow of the idealism buried for a decade beneath the débris of his spiritual and marital wreckage.

II

THE village of Standish, named long ago in honor of the sturdy Miles, lies beneath its venerable elms, a short mile in from the Sound, in the reminiscent attitude of one whose memories are no puerile affairs. The position of the ancient houses, grouped about the village common like children squatting in a ring, adds to this appearance of brooding placidity. Scarcely one of these houses—spacious, many-windowed, invariably white—but has contributed its paragraph to American history.

The common itself, crisscrossed by four pebbled paths, had known the rumble of

drums and the restless scuffle of horses' feet when the loyal citizens of Standish had responded to the call of their country. A weather-stained but purposeful young private, in Civil War regalia, stands sturdily at the intersection of the four paths, to commemorate one of these occasions. A sparsely lettered board, standing whitely beneath the trees, and richly embellished with gold stars, attests to the town's most recent sacrifice.

Richard Sells, making his way up from the little railroad station, responded to the valiant significance of these memorials with a thrill of appreciation; but if the town had enriched the nation's military archives, it wore its honors with modest stoicism. The slothful spell of a June morning overlay the streets and the common. Only the flowers appeared cognizant of Richard's avid gaze. They were everywhere—irregular beds of sweet William violating the emerald of sedate lawns; crimson ramblers rioting over trellises; nasturtiums peering from porch and window boxes.

Well off the State road, almost no motorists ever invaded the isolated little town, and the atmosphere was blessedly free of the stench and fret of cars. As he strolled beneath the drooping elms, something of the pervasive tranquillity communicated itself to Richard Sells.

At the lower end of the common, he found a street which was the "business section" of Standish. Here were the post office and the bank, a cluster of stores, and a battle-scarred building, once a church, now a "movie palace," if one could give credence to the sign above the door and to the high-sounding announcements of coming attractions.

Richard strolled into the corner drug store, invested in a pack of cigarettes, and favored the vendor with one of his weary smiles.

"The beach can't be far from here, if my map means what it seems to say," he remarked.

"It's straight down the road," vouchsafed the druggist pleasantly. "This way—I'll show you."

He ambled, a plump, pink, unhurried individual, to the screen door, and, leaning comfortably against the plate glass window, waved a blunt finger.

"Straight down, and then take the first road to the right. This one would take you plumb to the sluice, and you'd have to

come back. 'The road leadin' to the right 'll take you to the beach.'"

Richard thanked him, and moved off down the road. Judging by the map from which he had selected Standish because of its evident inaccessibility, the village had appeared to overhang the Sound. Apparently his deductions had been a trifle optimistic, though the druggist's directions implied that the water could not be very far away.

His sense of peace grew as he walked. A sort of mellow retrospection seemed to emanate from the widely spaced houses and to hover beneath the gigantic elms, as if the old town realized that it was no longer part of the parade, but an outdated and slightly rheumatic spectator, tolerated because of its past glories. Once he had left the substantial prosperity of the village proper behind, the houses took on the down-at-heel air of crumbling gentility—the challenging gentility of a respectable spinster who wears her last season's hat with a rakish air that disarms sympathy.

Presently he came to the turn where the road led down to the beach. He could see the water, suave and green, with a few sporadic sails sown on its placid surface.

Now the country took on the flavor and the color of the sea. Fields of waving beach grass flanked the red road. The scattered houses were humble and weather-beaten, with trails of crushed oyster shells that served in lieu of paths. A crude sign before one of the houses announced that lobsters were for sale, and a trio of barefooted children romped around an upturned canoe in a yard where an old man sat ropping a sail.

Unconsciously, Richard quickened his pace, his spirit lifting to meet the salt-laden breeze that swept up from the water. If Standish knew that a dash of rose water in the coffee was a smart gesture, or that the Frisco had succeeded the fox trot, its serenity was unimpaired by the knowledge. Richard grinned at the whimsy, and the grin gave birth to an amused chuckle that brought him to an abrupt pause.

He had left the humble cottages behind now, and stood before the last house on the road—a rambling white affair of Colonial vintage, with a wide lawn that sloped down to meet the reaches of beach grass beyond. It was a stolid, substantial house, with a square tower protruding stoutly from the roof, and girdled by an iron balcony; but

it was not the house, nor the anomaly of the lookout, that held Richard's gaze.

What most attracted his attention was a plump white launch, at rest upon a couple of sturdy rollers, in the very middle of that precise lawn. There was something ludicrous in the picture—the stout little sea craft anchored in the midst of all this sedate circumspection, more than a hundred yards from the beach, snugly secure from the vagaries of the tides.

Richard moved impulsively across the grass, and read the cut brass letters athwart the stern of the launch, proclaiming that she was the Dorcas. The odor of fresh paint and turpentine clung to her, and her small deck showed clean stripes where a few boards had been wedged in beside the old. Hands in his pockets, Richard studied her with delighted curiosity, until a drawling voice rode into his reverie:

"Well, she ain't graceful, but she's pretty snug, eh?"

"Yes, I should say so—very," responded Richard promptly.

He found himself looking into a pair of small, twinkling blue eyes—so small, so deeply set in the leathery network about them, that they seemed to have been squeezed into their grooves by dint of the most persevering effort. Above the eyes were heavy tufts of ragged, beetling brows, in perfect affinity with the straggling mustache that bristled on the upper lip, and the visor of an ancient khaki cap sat jauntily over one ear.

Richard's swift appraisal guessed the stranger's age to be sixty. He was a massive figure of a man, weathered to a copper shade, with his face seamed and rutted by years, like the bark of an aged oak.

"I seen you come in to look her over," he announced with a chuckle; "but she ain't fer sale, mister."

"No? Isn't she seaworthy?" asked Richard politely.

"Oh, I guess she's seaworthy, all right, but I shouldn't wonder if she's plumb spoiled after all this coddlin'."

"She looks like a stout little bark," commented Richard critically. "I was wondering what she was doing up here, out of water."

"Jest a restin' her old bones. She needed it," said the old man, rocking gently from heel to toe as he spoke. "You should 'a' seen her when I brought her in!"

"Salvaged her, did you?"

"Salvaged her—yes, sir, with her star-board side staved in and her keel crushed. Oh, she was a sight, she was! I been workin' on her fer a couple o' years off and on."

"Going to launch her one of these days?"

The old man chuckled. The sound was like the suppressed roar of an amiable lion.

"I tell Dorcas—that's my daughter—I'm waitin' fer the tide." His shoulders shook at this pleasantry, and then his grin was succeeded by a portentous solemnity. "No lie, it did once—back in seventy-nine, that was. The water rose clean up here and flooded the cellar. I was a kid then. I recollect well paddlin' a dory around these very lawns."

"You don't say!" said Richard, with a polite show of wonder. "Tide rose that high, did it?"

"Yes, sir! I tell Dorcas what's happened once can happen agin, and one of these days we'll wake up to find the old girl afloat!" His voice rumbled off again on the wave of his mighty chuckle, which he cut short with a question. "Stranger in these parts, be ye?"

"Yes," replied Richard. "I'm just wandering around."

"Aim to stop awhile?"

"Yes, if I can find some one willing to take me in."

"There's a hotel uptown—sets a good table, they say. I ain't one to eat away from home myself, but they say the hotel sets a good table."

"But I'd rather not stay at a hotel," confided Richard, with a wistful glance toward the white house. "You see, I wanted to stay down here, nearer to the water. I thought I might prevail upon some family to take me in. I'm not particular, and I should be glad to pay their own price."

The old man's cordial loquacity was suddenly enveloped in a noncommittal silence. His weather-beaten face became a guileless mask of innocence.

"The hotel sets a good table," he repeated defensively.

"You don't happen to know of any one around here, do you, who would take a boarder for the summer?"

"No-o," said the old man thoughtfully. "Don't know's I do—no place *you'd* like to stay at, leastwise."

Richard took an uncertain step toward the road, but the drawling voice stopped him.

"Aim to stay the summer, do ye?"

"Yes," said Richard promptly, and with a faint hope in his eyes, though the question seemed to have been thrown out idly enough.

The old man merely pursed his lips and shrugged his stooped, lean shoulders, as if to indorse the idea as an excellent one.

"Fishing good around here?" asked Richard, as they strolled across the lawn side by side.

"Tolerable. Blackfish, and plenty of flounders—snapper blues, too, come August. You from the city?"

"New York."

"Well, now, I been there many a time. Never got far beyond the water front, though."

"You were a sailor?"

"I been everything from cabin boy to skipper. Fer twenty-eight years I was never in port fer more'n a month to one time."

"And now you've settled down on land," observed Richard, with a glance toward the thriving garden in the rear of the house.

"Jest like that lazy hulk back there." The old man jerked his head toward the plump launch. "I'm under petticoat orders, now. Dorcas—that's my daughter—she's skipper here."

Richard smiled. The noonday sun was pouring down upon his head, and the road and the fields of beach grass were in the lethargic torpor of breathless heat. He was conscious of a sharp reaction from his first buoyant enthusiasm—conscious that he was hungry, and that his lunch was still a problematical possibility.

"Well, if you ever do launch the Dorcas, I'll engage passage, if I'm around," he said genially. Then, with one of his rare, confident smiles: "I don't suppose you'd consider taking me in, would you? I can't imagine a more delightful spot than this. I can give you plenty of references, and I would be as little trouble as possible."

For a long moment the old man made no reply. With his hands buried deep in his khaki pockets, he received the suggestion with solemn deliberation. Richard's smile held something of the frustration and loneliness that lay behind him—something of boyish entreaty, which lifted the dislike of the well groomed and Malacca-burdened New Yorker that a place like Standish instinctively feels.

"I'm afeared that ain't possible, stran-

ger," he temporized gruffly. "We don't take boarders here."

"I know that, but I thought you might make an exception in my case. You see there's something about this old house, and about you—" The smile spoke for him again. "Well, something drew me straight down here. I felt, when I first saw the place, as if I had come home."

The old man's deliberate stare refused to hold any longer. His eyes shifted, and his voice carried the husky portent of one who reveals a great secret.

"I'll tell you what, stranger, you can ask Dorcas—that's my daughter. She's skipper here, like I told you. I'm only mate, and"—he finished with a whisper—"she's a tartar, that girl. Come along! No harm askin', is there?"

He was leading the way up the gravel path that wound around the broad foundation of the old house to a small back porch canopied by a rich trellis of morning glories. Here he paused, while he fixed a solemn glance upon Richard—a glance blended of trepidation and fearful auguries. Then he lifted his voice.

"Dorcas! Be ye there, girl?"

He turned to Richard.

"Course we ain't never done it before. Not that I wouldn't be willin', but the girl, she's—"

"Yes, father! Do you want me?"

By this time Richard had been sufficiently overwhelmed by the old man's timid intercession on his account to experience a genuine sense of guilt at the sound of the girl's voice. Now he glanced up at the figure in the doorway, while astonishment succeeded his fear and swift appreciation tumbled after.

The screen door had swung outward, to disclose a young girl in the aperture. Such a girl, with carefully calculated effect, might grace the star rôle in some rural drama on Broadway, but she was the first of her type that Richard had ever seen in the flesh. She was slender, with the slenderness of immaturity, but she held herself with the erect poise of abundant health and vitality—shoulders squared, small feet planted firmly.

"Now, Dorcas!" began the old man. "Now, girl, here's a young man that wants—now lemme get through, and don't go flyin' into a rage—"

"Father!" Her puzzled frown flew from her father to Richard, who was awkwardly

twisting the hat he had snatched off at her appearance. The old man's face was working convulsively, and from his throat came a mighty rumble. "Father! Now *what* are you laughing at? Father!"

He conquered his mirth with tremendous effort, and drew the back of his hand across his wet eyes.

"Why, at *him*, Dorcas!" He jerked his head toward the astounded Richard. "Did you see his face, girl? Did you see his face when you come out—how scared it was, and then—" He went off into another shaking fit. "I told him you were a regular tartar. He was plumb scared. Oh, Lordy!"

Crimson rode slowly up beneath the film of tan that coated the girl's cheeks, and she caught her nether lip between her teeth.

"Father, how *can* you? And before a stranger, too!"

"It's all right, Dorie. There, now, I'm sorry. I've said it, ain't I? I jest couldn't resist it, but I'm sorry."

His humility was abject. The girl's lips lifted in an indulgent smile as she turned to Richard.

"He's incorrigible," she said. "You must forgive him—we all have to. Father's jokes!"

She spread her fingers in helpless pantomime, as if the subject were far beyond words. Richard was quick to follow up his advantage.

"I had been pleading with your father to take me in as a sort of boarder. He said that yours was the deciding vote, but that he was willing."

"Now, father, aren't you ashamed of yourself?" she said, and turned to Richard. "Of course that's for father to decide, and it looks as if he had decided already—though we don't take boarders, you know."

"Now, Dorcas, girl, you know how you be, you—"

"Daddy, behave!"

The old man drooped lugubriously under the admonition, but his eyes were merry as they sought Richard's.

"Didn't I tell you she was skipper, friend? You see fer yourself how it is."

But Richard was smiling up at the girl. "We've never done anything like that before," she was telling him; "though I've often thought it would be company for father if he had another man around."

"I should try to be as little trouble as possible," Richard assured her.

"I'm sure of that," she said gravely, and shifted her clear gaze to her father. "What do you say, dad?"

The old man rocked thoughtfully from heel to toe.

"It ain't up to me, girl. You're the one has to do the work. If you feel like doin' it, I'm willin' enough."

Her young face sobered as she looked at Richard again. Despite the sophistication of his well cut clothes, despite his cosmopolitan manner and pleasant, cultured voice, there was a wistfulness, an entreaty, in his slightly smiling mouth and eyes that neutralized his *savoir faire*. It was this same quality that had moved the old man out near the anchored Dorcas, and now the girl was aware of it. She was also aware of an odd response to it that was almost maternal. Her eyes smiled squarely into his.

"Well, at least there's no harm in trying it, is there? I think it might work out nicely. Daddy and I are alone here, and he gets frightfully bored with me sometimes." The old man growled his concurrence in that. "You understand that we can't make company of you, but if you are willing to fall in with our humble routine—we live very simply, you know."

"Which is exactly what I want," Richard broke in heartily. "If you'll accept me just as one of the family, I shall be no end grateful."

"You'll have to watch your p's and q's!" prophesied the old man, with a chuckle.

"Now, father!" chided his daughter, and to Richard she said pleasantly: "Will you come in? I'm just ready to put dinner on the table."

They filed into the kitchen—a great square room with braided rugs on the floor, a range set in a wide old chimney of red brick, and muslin sash curtains at the windows. The same air of tranquillity that he had felt in the village pervaded the big room.

"I left my bags up at the station," he announced.

"Shall we give him the south room, Dorcas girl?"

"The east room will be cooler, dad."

"But I thought mebbe he'd like the view from the south windows."

Richard broke in half timidly.

"I've been wondering, since I'm lucky enough to be here, whether the room in the tower is in use," he suggested. "I noticed

it from the road. There must be a view from those windows."

"Lordy, boy, that room's like to be as hot as Tophet, come real warm weather!"

"In that case I could carry a blanket out on the balcony," said Richard, with an eager undercurrent in his voice. "That lookout tower of yours has been wooing me ever since I first caught sight of it."

"I'm really afraid you wouldn't be comfortable up there," ventured the girl thoughtfully.

"It ain't been used in a dog's age," appended the old man.

This duet of deprecation went on for several moments, while the smiling but determined Richard stood his ground.

"Well," said the girl, finally, "there's a bed up there, and I can get Rose Ruby to clean it up this afternoon. Why not take him up to look at it, dad?"

The old man appealed to Richard.

"You see how 'tis! You see who's skipper, don't you? Come along—we'll take a look, anyway."

Richard followed him through a cool, spacious hall, up two flights of broad stairs, and then up a third flight shut off from the main body of the house by a door, and shooting up, narrow and almost perpendicular, into a square, low-ceilinged room. Windows, closely shuttered now, looked out from all four walls, and the must and dust of years was in the stale air.

"Wait till I open a blind, so as we can see a thing or two."

The old man fumbled for the nearest window. One after another he flung them open, and spread the blinds wide, while Richard stood near the door watching the old room lift itself from the shroud of darkness that had enveloped it.

"There, now, and here's a door out to the balcony. Like as not the bed's hard as nails."

But Richard had stepped through the narrow doorway. For a dumb, crowded moment he stood with his hand on the corroded iron rail. Below him the yellow road he had traveled fell away in a gentle slope from the main highway to the water's edge, burning its purposeful way past the squatting fishermen's cottages as if impatient of their stoic quiescence. To the south lay the Sound, embellished by an irregular fringe of beach that traced the shore to the east and west. Four miles out Shipton Island light reared itself like an admonishing

finger over the vicious shoals on which it was built.

"Them islands athwart the light there—Thimble Islands, we call 'em. They're perilous mean fer a skipper that don't know these waters."

"Thimble Islands!" repeated Richard absently, for the beauty of the scene stretching away beneath him had left him without words.

"Ye can see nigh to New London with the glasses," said the old man. "That's the way my mother kept her eagle eye on my father, long after he'd got beyond reach of her voice!"

His voice drawled on, the words blurring into a good-natured drone that swelled suddenly into an announcement.

"Stayton—Peter Stayton—that's my name, friend, same as my grandfather who built this house. You've heard of him, mebbe—him that built the fust salmon wheel in New England, and spliced it onto his sloop, the old Dorcas."

Richard's eyes met the bright blue gaze that glimed into his own. He held out his hand.

"You'll overlook my absent-mindedness, won't you? I should have introduced myself long before this." He stopped abruptly, his glance still held by those expectant blue eyes, and he drew a deep breath before he spoke again. "Mr. Stayton, I have as much reason to be proud of the name I bear as you have; but just at present, for various reasons—none of them vicious, I assure you—I should like to discard it. Understand, you don't have to agree to this. I can furnish you with all the facts you want; but—will you take me on faith, my friend, as Smith or Brown or Jones? It's nothing more nor less than a whim, but I should appreciate it if you felt you could humor me."

Old Peter Stayton rocked gently from heel to toe—his invariable habit when he was debating on weighty matters; but the eyes that impaled Richard's did not withdraw their steady gaze.

"I've come out here to rest," Richard went on gravely. "I've been part of the mad scramble in town for more than ten years, and now that I've shaken all that off"—he smiled wanly—"well, it seems to me that if I drag an intrinsic part of myself into my retreat here, some of the sediment of the city is bound to adhere to it. I'd like to come into your household as you

might once have picked me up at sea—stripped."

"H-m!" grunted the old man judiciously. "Come out here to rest up, have ye?"

"Yes."

"What be ye, in the city?"

"A banker," said Richard, lumping his manifold interests into an understandable word.

"Rich?"

The word was put soberly enough, and Richard considered it with due gravity.

"I suppose you would call me rich—yes."

"You say you got papers and things with you?"

"In my bags at the station."

"We-ell," drawled Peter, "I've lived nigh on to sixty years, and I ain't never been took in yet. I've yet to be deceived by a face, and I liked yourn the fust minute I clapped eyes on it." He held out his hand solemnly, but deep in his twinkling eyes the light of a long quiescent gambling spirit gleamed. "I'll take ye on your own terms, young feller. Brown, ye say, or Jones, maybe? Brown comes easier to say. Brown it 'll be, hey?"

Richard's hand was once more taken into the horny grip of his host. As they pumped arms genially, he had the sense of a lifting weight—a sense of floating free from the cluttered débris of his past.

III

THE voice of the girl followed him up to those buoyant heights, rising clear and authoritative from the stair well.

"Dinner's ready! Don't dally until it gets cold, father!"

Peter's grin vanished beneath his straggling mustache.

"Brown, remember," he said portentously. "Better not let on to Dorcas that it ain't your real name. No tellin' how she'd take it. She's a tartar, that girl o' mine!"

Richard came to know, in time, that this was the old man's most precious pleasantry—his assumption of a grievance against his daughter's acerbic characteristics. But now he followed the massive old figure downstairs, his responsive smile reflecting Peter's own trepidation.

The kitchen table was laid for three, and the savory odor of broiling fish permeated the room. The girl's light frock was covered by a checked apron, her cheeks

were flushed, and little beads of perspiration sprinkled her nose and forehead. She smiled up at Richard, in the act of setting a covered vegetable dish on the table.

"Did the tower room come up to your expectations?"

"It surpassed them," he said. "I'm only afraid you'll never be able to get me out of it!"

Peter broke in with a significant cough behind his hand.

"Dorcas, this is Mr. Brown. That's his name—Brown." His eyelid dropped with elaborate cunning over his eye. "Kin, likely, to old Ebenezer Brown that was settled up New London way back in eighty-six, eh?"

Richard moved hurriedly toward the girl, his lips twitching.

"Miss Stayton, this is an occasion for rejoicing with me."

She gave him her hand, after brushing it lightly against her apron, and returned his grip with her warm, firm clasp.

"I hope you will like it here," she said primly, and broke into a sudden laugh. "As master of ceremonies, father is marvelous, don't you think?"

Her laugh removed the last vestige of restraint, and they seated themselves at the table amid a gay babble of small talk.

"Swordfish!" remarked Peter with gusto, and helped Richard with lavish bounty.

There was talk of fish, then, and of oyster spawn, and finally of gardens. The girl reminded her father that the tomato bugs were swarming again. At this announcement, Peter threw a triumphant glance at Richard.

"No rest fer the wicked, Mr. Brown. That's just the way she keeps after me!"

The girl smiled.

"He pretends it's a chore," she explained, "but I can't keep him out of the garden. I tell him he'll kill the plants with kindness."

It proved to be a jovial dinner, the first of the sort that Richard had ever participated in, with the heaped dishes on the table, and the coffee bubbling in an old granite pot on the range a dozen feet away. It was decided that young Ross Leete should be sent for the bags and trunk at the station, and bring them down in a hired jitney. Rose Ruby—who, it appeared, was servant in general to the entire village—would be delegated to put the tower room in order.

Shot through all this inconsequential small talk, weaving it into an exquisite symphony, was the almost tangible bond of sympathy between the girl and her father. Watching them, listening to their disarming exchange of crisp repartee, it occurred to Richard that he was in the presence of a human relationship almost holy in its perfection. He saw through the carefully preserved fiction of old Peter's constant mutiny—saw that behind this apparent rebellion against petticoat rule the old man cherished a tremendous affection for his "tartar" daughter.

His bags came that afternoon, marshaled by a gangling boy, and the indispensable Rose Ruby appeared soon after. Richard was squatting contentedly on his trunk when she came into the room—a tattered scarecrow of an old woman, with a hooked nose that threatened her chin when she grinned at him, displaying an irregular series of pointed yellow teeth.

She surveyed Richard from the doorway, leaning, like some outlandish harri-dan, on her broom, before she favored him with one of her devastating smiles.

"Howdy? Pete says you aim to stop here awhile."

"Yes," said Richard. "Not a bad place to stop, is it?" he added pleasantly. She cackled knowingly.

"Oh, I know better places—more lively. I wuz to Coney Island wunst."

"No! And how did you like it?"

"It was grand!" She rolled her eyes in a reminiscent transport. "All them lights and bands! You ever been to Coney Island?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Ain't it grand, now?" She sobered. "Be you a painter?"

"No—oh, no," he assured her.

"There was one here wunst," she confided. "He used to go down on the beach an' paint when there wasn't nothin' *there* to paint." She cackled again at the memory. "I like to split my sides laughin' at that painter."

Richard drifted out to the balcony, in self-defense. He had still to appraise Rose Ruby at her proper worth. As village quidnunc, the old woman was possessed of a shrewd sagacity and rich suspicion, and these qualities imbued her most prosaic days with plenty of color.

By evening the tower room was clean and comfortable. Dorcas herself spread

the bed with immaculate sheets smelling faintly of cedar, and tucked in the sides with brisk, deft movements. A chest of dull old mahogany drawers held his water pitcher and bowl. A cabriolet, slightly battered, but not violated by paint or polish, braided rugs on the floor, a shelf for his books—these constituted the other furnishings of the room.

Moving awkwardly about, his eyes ever wandering to the fascinations of the view beyond his windows, Richard protested at the girl's turning housemaid for him.

"But Rose Ruby couldn't make up a bed that would stay put until morning," she told him, smiling fleetingly up at him. "She's very much impressed since she knows you've been to Coney Island."

They both laughed at this.

"You see, she went there on her wedding trip, I don't know *how* long ago."

"And you?" asked Richard amusedly. "Have you ever been to Coney?"

"Never," she admitted, and her eyes danced; "but I've seen the Woolworth Building and Grant's Tomb."

"Ah, you have been to New York!"

"As a graduation present from dad," she said. "I had a dreadful time keeping him away from the water front!"

There was a freshness of appeal about her which broke through the bulwark of silence that Richard had intended to preserve as self-protection. He found himself drawing her out, while he reveled in the abundant vigor of her slender figure and capable little hands. She had, it appeared, attended normal school in New Haven, with a view to teaching, but had left at the end of her sophomore year.

"Father needed me," was her simple explanation of that.

"He's been retired for some time?"

"Since I was born—and my mother died."

The brief history explained the girl's correct vocabulary. Richard marveled at her apparent contentment—marveled, too, at the refractory tendrils of brown hair that clung in little curls to her damp forehead. "We'll have supper at six," she told him, with a cursory glance of satisfaction about the room. "I expect it seems odd to you, having dinner in the middle of the day; but we prefer it, because it gets the heaviest work disposed of early."

That night Richard dragged the Queen Anne chair out on the balcony, lit a ciga-

rette, and relaxed. There was no moon, but the brilliant stars were doing their best to make up for this deprivation. They seemed to hang just over the top of the superannuated horse chestnut trees that sentineled the lawn. The sea lay beyond, a black, vast void, with the light from Shipton Island sending its staccato wink coquettishly forth to delight passing liners. Over all lay the faint splash and suck of water and the plaintive chorus of frog and kingfisher.

Richard had a curious sense of having floated off into some stellar space, of gazing back on the feverish futilities of the world with sudden penetration. His thoughts flew to Della, who at the moment was somewhere on that broad expanse of water, bound for Paris and its hectic gayeties. She would be dancing now, probably, with a cigarette hanging from her pale fingers, and the illicit gleam of a smuggled flask in her eyes.

The picture of her as she had been ten years before sketched itself beside this one. A little rose and gold butterfly she had been, with tiny feet and hands that were never still. She had charmed him from a staid and bookish existence, had left irrevocably the shimmering pollen of her butterfly wings on his staid and bookish old house. So busy—so futile—so empty!

How amused she would be at this, his desperate gesture of emancipation—at these simple country people who had taken him in—at the girl in her gingham and the old man with his halting rhetoric and childish posing. "Hicks," she would call them.

But he had left all that behind him. It was one with the roar of the Elevated and the chug of taxis and the raucous dissonance of jazz. He had come out here to forget.

The future? Richard Brown had no future. The present hour—this was his!

IV

WITH a swift adaptability born of his eagerness, Richard fell in with the pleasant, uneventful routine of the Stayton household. It was a routine of homely duties about the house and garden—duties which occasionally extended to the beach as well.

Half a mile offshore, a dozen red and white floats marked the presence of old Peter's lobster crates. With a pair of high boots and khaki trousers, bought at the general store to replace the knickers he had

brought, Richard often accompanied his host in the dirty, flat-bottomed rowboat to haul in the lobsters. He learned to haul in and lift out the struggling green captives, to toss in a new supply of hermits, and to comment judicially on the size of the haul.

Occasionally, too, they went off fishing, anchoring near the shoals and drop-lining for blackfish and flounder. These they carried proudly home to Dorcas, who would compliment them on their skill, to the tune of Peter's aggrieved complaint that a man of his years and experience should stoop to such a senile pastime.

"Anglin' like a half-wit over the side of a boat!" he would grumble, while his little, deep-set eyes danced and his horny fingers jerked self-consciously at the ends of his mustache.

It was a delightful game that the girl and her father played. Richard's amusement was a blend of envy for their contentment and tenderness toward the transparency of their pretended disagreements.

Then there were the evenings when they would walk to the village for the evening mail—which consisted of the New York paper that Dorcas insisted upon subscribing for. Occasionally, in the stiffly proper parlor, with its broad stretch of patterned carpet, its plush lambrequins and straight-backed chairs and albums, Dorcas would open the little rosewood organ and drag her father, reluctant, protesting, but immensely pleased, to the plush-covered stool.

"Now, father—no hymns!" she would admonish. "Let's have 'Old Uncle Ned,' or 'Sarah's Young Man.'"

"Listen to her!" Peter would command Richard. "A pagan that girl is—that's what!"

"No more than yourself, dad. Come on, we're waiting!" And to Richard: "Wait until you hear father play! All bass and no treble!"

With a malicious grin, the old man would spread his gnarled, awkward fingers and roar out the first verse of some familiar old hymn until the house reverberated to the din.

These musical orgies generally greased the old man's loquacity. Politics, the sea, religion—all were reduced with equal ease to the terms of his own simple tenets. He was amusingly original on the subject of God and the various ecclesiastical sects and denominations.

"I ain't a church man. I don't see that religion's any better wrapped up in a sermon than in the Bible. Why should I listen to a preacher, when I can read my Bible to home, and be comfortable? A man can't go far wrong when he's got a Bible and knows the Ten Commandments. I take my religion like I take calomel—when I feel the need of it."

To all this homely routine Dorcas Stayton added a dash and tang of color—the dash and tang of vibrant youth and beauty and unvarying sweetness of temper; but Richard had been in Standish some three weeks before he became acquainted with the girl as an entity, so closely had she associated herself in his mind with the house, the dinner table, and old Peter.

He had wandered vaguely around a curve in the beach on an afternoon in July, when he came upon a narrow salt inlet that wound into the swamps of beach grass. He followed its course aimlessly until he espied a bright checked frock and saw the girl shoving off a small round-bottomed skiff.

"Ahoy, Miss Stayton!" he called.

"Ahoy there, Mr. Brown!" she returned merrily.

He paused beside the boat, which was almost hidden by the tall grass.

"This looks very furtive to me," he chided. "Are you going down to the sea in ships?"

"I do, often," she told him, smiling up from beneath the crude farmer's hat that she had tied, for safety's sake, beneath her chin.

"Do you take passengers?"

"Only useful passengers," she said. "If you'll take the rudder, you may come for a cruise."

He promptly bounded into the boat.

"No sooner said than done! But why not let me row?"

"Because that's my job," she told him.

"It keeps me fit, and I love to row."

She settled herself amidships and pushed off with an oar.

"This little skiff is my pet," she confided. "Dad had it made for me. Isn't it a dear?"

Richard nodded. His eyes were following the grace and skill with which she dipped and pulled at her oars. She seemed utterly devoid of self-consciousness or coquetry, though her self-reliance had cost her none of her inherent femininity. Here were no languishing glances, no calculated

lift of lips or arching of brows. Her widely spaced gray eyes met his evenly, and her smile was rare and genuine enough to be ineffably enchanting when it came.

"Steer for the little rock island due south," she commanded. In the next breath she added: "You're looking much fitter, Mr. Brown."

"I hadn't known that I wasn't looking fit," he rejoined lazily.

"You looked—well"—she paused for the right word—"shopworn when you came. You know what I mean, perhaps—so many city people look that way. Their eyes get sort of blurred, like a mirror when it's handled too much."

"I shouldn't wonder if we do," he agreed, a little startled by the young girl's unexpected insight. "In the city, one gets the bloom rubbed off in the shuffle."

"That's it," she said brightly, and added, with a smile: "Well, yours is coming back. Standish, they say, is a wonderful beauty restorer."

Their laughter mingled at that.

"You like Standish?" he asked.

"Oh, I love it!" she cried.

"You don't long, as they say most country-bred girls do, for the bright lights of the city?"

She shook her head gravely.

"I'm afraid of them—the lights," she confessed. "It seems to me that the brighter they are, the more they hide. I'm afraid of the things they hide!"

Richard found himself suddenly confronted by a very attractive anomaly. Here was a girl who slipped into none of the familiar niches occupied by the types he knew. His curiosity stirred. Was her serenity evidence of stupidity? Or, young as she was, had she bridged the perplexities of life, and thus achieved her high place of content?

He found himself plumbing the depths of her singularly clear and methodical young mind. In return, he told her about himself—about the part of his life that he could recall with happiness—about his boyhood, and his father's farm, and the old house on Madison Avenue.

It was a lazy afternoon, an ideal setting for confidences. The little skiff cut sturdily through the gentle swell as they rounded the little island of washed rock.

"I often come out here and read, or just sit and think," she told him. "It's ever so much bigger at low tide."

He looked at the protruding rock with new interest, and could picture Dorcas sitting there, the one vivid patch of color in all this gray expanse of water.

"You must bring me out some time when the tide is low," he suggested, and she promised.

"We can't come when it's dead low, or we should have trouble getting ashore again," she told him.

They rowed slowly back, chatting lazily. Richard listened to her quaint observations with growing eagerness. She was so unaffected, so free of self-conceit or rhetorical cant; yet he had proved that she could think and could talk. For some reason the discovery elated him. Her beauty, he reflected—for he had just discovered that she was beautiful—would have been enough; but it seemed that she was even more richly endowed.

The sun was beginning to droop sleepily toward the western horizon when they tied the boat and made their way over the fields toward the white house. As they walked, Richard was conscious of the girl's graceful, unmincing stride, and of the luminous vitality that seemed to emanate from her in a sort of aura.

"Dad must have gone to town," she said, when they reached the back door and saw no signs of the familiar figure in the garden or pottering about the girl's namesake, the captive boat. She laughed mischievously. "I'll hurry supper and pretend he's late. Then *he* can pretend he's being abused!"

"Then let me help," pleaded Richard, catching her playful spirit.

"All right!" she agreed, and slipped her arms into an enveloping apron. "Let's hurry—it'll be fun to hear him!"

"What can I do?"

"Do you really want to help?"

"I insist."

"Well, then"—she was looking at his tweeds—"you must have an apron, too. Then you may set the table."

"Good!"

She unearthed a second apron from a drawer, and turned to him.

"Now, turn around!"

He obeyed.

"Lift up your arms!"

He did so. Her firm, slender young arms encircled him for an instant as she drew the apron under his armpits. Then he felt her tying it securely between his shoulder blades.

Her touch, light and inconsequential as it was, invested him with an odd exhilaration. He was aware of a swift throb in his throat. It was as if some intangible mist had lifted from the world, leaving it crystal clear and luminous.

"There!" she said.

He whirled on her. They stood for a moment, smiling into each other's eyes, before the girl moved off in her matter-of-fact way, still laughing at Richard over her shoulder.

"The knives and forks are in the table drawer. The plates are in the pantry—the supper plates, not the big ones. Let's hurry!"

"You bet!"

He snatched open the table drawer, conquering an amazing impulse to click his heels together. The smile remained on his lips. Here they were, knives and forks and shining spoons. *How* they shone! But then everything was shining and beautiful. Why, he must have been ill not to have seen all this beauty before—not to have *felt* it as he was feeling it now!

"Better not be too rambunctious, or you'll break those plates," she warned, laughing across at him from the stove.

"Let's!" he cried. "Let's break one—just one, to celebrate!"

She gave him a shocked frown.

"To celebrate what?" she asked incredulously. "How fearfully extravagant! To celebrate what?"

"Oh—why, just to celebrate," he said, and lowered the plate with a sheepish grin to its place on the table.

What was he saying? Why should he celebrate? He fumbled about in his mind for the answer. He found it, and took a few silent dance steps on the rug.

He had it! He was happy—that was it, happy! He didn't know why, but he was happy!

V

RICHARD was amazed and a little awed, on awaking the following morning, to find that his inexplicable ecstasy still held. He had fought sleep far into the night, with the childish fear that he would wake to find that exquisite rapture gone, like *Aladdin's* castle; but his sleep had been dreamless, and he woke to a world bathed in a wondrous light.

He bounded out of bed and strode to the balcony, where he stood in his pyja-

mas, drinking in the salt air and feasting his eyes on the green beauty spread out beneath him.

The sound of a dozen motor boats, starting out from the sluice to explore lobster pots, reached him faintly. What vigorous beauty there was in the sound! He felt the sudden urge to speak. It was almost as if he were being called upon, like some penitent at a revival meeting, to testify to the miracle that had happened to him. He was happy!

Leaping down the stairs to his breakfast, he found Dorcas busy making toast and old Peter squatting on the doorstep, whittling a piece of wood.

"Good morning! And what a morning!" he cried.

The girl gave him one of her swift, buoyant smiles. Her father turned lazily.

"No breakfast yet, mate! That girl's slow as molasses. She does it jest to pester me, I know!"

"Now, dad, you hush, or you'll get no breakfast," she commanded.

"You see!" He laid his plight before the smiling Richard. "You see what a daughter she is to me!"

"I see that you're a fraud, Peter Stayton," he said, beaming down cheerfully upon the squat figure. "That's what *you* are—a fraud!"

The old man's eyes twinkled.

"You're lookin' perker as a perker, this morning, mate!"

"And feeling perker," added Richard. "Do we haul lobsters to-day?"

"Oh, I s'pose so, though my back's gone back on me."

When Peter was not complaining of his daughter's lack of filial affection, he was grumbling about his back. With a hand resting plaintively across his spine, he would recount the painful and lasting injury he had suffered in a fall from the rigging, more than twenty years before.

"I come down smack on my heels, like this, and a pain shot up to here." He designated the exact spot. "You'd 'a' thought it would 'a' hurt my heels, wouldn't ye? But no, sir—it settled in my back, that pain did, and now in wet weather—"

"But it's sunny this morning, dad! Come along and dish up!"

"The girl's got no sense o' sympathy," he observed with the greatest relish. "She's cold and heartless. She knows it's rowin' that makes it hurt wuss."

"Then why don't you buy a put-put for your boat, daddy?"

"Think I was made o' money, to hear her, wouldn't ye?"

But he was in the highest good humor at the breakfast table, and was careful to serve the choicest strips of bacon and the neatest egg to his daughter.

Richard had learned to love the old fisherman, and Peter Stayton's buried little blue eyes dwelt with genuine affection upon the younger man.

"If I'd had a son, I shouldn't 'a' minded if he'd been purty much like you, matey," he was wont to say on those rare occasions when he forgot that he was a fierce old fellow. "But the Lord saw I needed chastenin', and he sent a petticoat to do it," he would wind up, with a lugubrious sigh.

Through the following days Richard's happiness stayed with him, though he kept a doubtful vigilance over it, fearful of its leaving him, fearful of being plunged back into the dark morass of his weary doubts and bitter loneliness. Dorcas Stayton companioned him now on many of his explorations, and they drifted together imperceptibly, fishing lazily from the skiff, taking long walks over the rolling inland country, or sitting on the gunwale of the captive launch, while old Peter fussed and fumed in her hold. They had nicknamed the old boat "the lawn goer," despite Peter's bitter protestations that they were being irreverent.

Summer matured richly. The garden yielded yellow squash, crisp string beans, and an abundance of peas. Richard learned to shell these nicely, sitting on the doorstep, with the girl's encouraging voice urging him on to magnificent effort. The spacious mahogany offices on Broad Street, the old Madison Avenue house, the summer place at East Hampton, his cars, his clubs, and Della—even Della—had assumed the vague unreality of a dream. Only this was real, Standish and old Peter and the girl and the hook-nosed, shrewish Rose Ruby. These were real!

"Jake Stout was tellin' me to-day that Tad Bowen, over to New London, has an engine he wants to sell," Peter remarked one evening. "Seems some city feller bought it off Tad, and then traded it back fer somethin' else."

"Why don't you go up and look at it, daddy?" urged Dorcas, catching the under-

current of desire in her father's voice. "It might do for your boat."

"Listen to her! How do you know if it might do, girl? And Tad Bowen's that near, I never got a bargain off him in my life."

The girl was undeceived. She flashed a knowing smile at Richard.

"You know you want it, dad!"

"Nothin' o' the sort!" protested Peter indignantly.

"And you know you're dying to get up to New London and tell all those old reprobates around the water front what a fine skipper you used to be."

"Now ain't that like a woman?" demanded Peter disgustedly. "I ain't been up to New London in a dog's age, and you know it!"

"About time you went, crosspatch!"

"And you call my friends reprobates! Jest fer that I don't stir a step; and what with my back and all, you can jest take over the rowin' yourself, young woman!"

"All right, dear. You'd only go up there and drink a lot of Tad Bowen's hard cider, and come back with a headache," observed Dorcas casually.

"What?" roared Peter. "Ye impudent little hussy! Accuse me of gettin' drunk, will ye?"

"I didn't say 'drunk,' daddy," corrected the girl innocently.

"No, ye didn't say it, but I know what's behind them eyes of yours! Let me tell ye right now"—he waved his heavy forefinger at her in a beautiful imitation of uncontrollable rage—"I'm a goin' up to New London fer that engine! Now, we'll see who's cap'n here!"

Old Peter lapsed into a mumbling basso of self-pity and disgust. The girl's lips were twitching, and her eyes were merry. Both participants in this perfectly transparent skirmish had achieved their objectives, and the family tradition had been nicely preserved.

VI

AFTER dinner, the following day, Peter doffed his disreputable cap, donned a baggy suit of gray, shaved carefully, and brushed the stubborn bristles of his thin hair wetly against his forehead. Scattering homilies and protestations in his wake, he departed for the "depot" and New London.

Rose Ruby had been called in for the emergency. The old woman was to sleep

in the room next to Dorcas, in case Peter should happen not to get back that night.

"Of course," Dorcas told Richard, as they watched the old man off down the hot, yellow road, "he won't be back until tomorrow morning. He knows it, and he knows that I know it, but he always pretends it's an accident, and writes a letter of complaint to the railroad about the poor train service."

"The dear old infant!" The tenderness in Richard's eyes matched the girl's. "He's a wonderful old scout!"

"He's a saint," amended the girl softly.

Richard helped to prepare supper that evening, peeling apples for sauce, and standing by admirably while Dorcas made biscuits. It seemed to him that daily he found more to admire in this vivid young creature, with her simple beauty and her immense funds of reserve. His thin lips were forever lifted in a smile these days. His tall, lean figure had taken on the sturdy vitality of the native fisherman. His long hands were brown and slightly roughened.

Supper was late because, as Dorcas complained mischievously, "they had dawdled." There was cold lobster, and the biscuits were miraculously light. The chocolate cake was slathered thick with rich frosting, and the apple sauce was pleasantly tart as contrast.

"These biscuits are the work of an artist!" enthused Richard. "I'm beginning to think you are that—an artist!"

She shrugged her slender shoulders, but her eyes glowed with pleasure.

"I've been making biscuits since I was fourteen," she told him.

Richard was suddenly conscious of their complete aloneness. It was the first time they had sat down to a meal without old Peter, and there was enchantment in it. They faced each other across the table, their glances meeting merrily over each mouthful. Richard praised the apple sauce enthusiastically, and was promptly rebuked, since he had made it himself. He was subdued by this reminder, and licked a smudge of frosting from his finger tips.

"Can't afford to lose a crumb of it," he declared.

They laughed at his greed. Richard had never felt so full of laughter.

"By Jove," he cried, "I have an idea! Suppose you take me out in the skiff to see your own private island! We can watch the sunset on the water, too."

"We'll have to hurry, if we want to see the sunset," she said. "Shall we leave the dishes?"

"Yes, and I'll dry them when we come home."

"I'll do 'em, Dorcas."

It was Rose Ruby from the doorway. The grotesque, bent figure seemed for a moment to have shut out the evening glow behind her. Her nose came down to meet her chin over her yellow smile, and her bright little eyes regarded them with a sort of baleful relish.

"Oh, it's you, Rose Ruby! Well, come along in—you're just in time." Rose Ruby sidled into the room. "There's some coffee on the stove, if you haven't had your supper, and plenty of biscuits."

Richard felt a distinct sense of relief when they started down the path.

"She's an ugly old customer, that Rose Ruby of yours."

"Oh, she's a good old thing," defended Dorcas. "Of course, she can't help the way she looks."

Which disposed of Rose Ruby. Through the mellow glow of approaching twilight they trudged down the road to the beach. The tide was full, and the dainty little skiff was well afloat among the beach grass.

"I'm going to row to-night, while you pretend you're a lady of leisure," announced Richard, and Dorcas settled herself with mock docility in the stern. He pulled off. "Make for your rock island, matey!"

"Right-o, cap'n!"

The beach fell away from them. Presently they were making their way across a perfectly flat world—a shimmering, iridescent world, with a bending canopy of fading blue, puffed here and there by a bit of floating swan's-down. In the west, the half closed eye of the sun peered redly across at them.

"I know what heaven is like, now!" observed Richard gravely.

"I never have liked the idea of a gold and silver heaven," contributed Dorcas.

"Too much polishing to keep it bright," appended Richard, and their laughter pealed forth as if the whimsy were the richest of jokes. "Where's that island of yours, mate?"

"Straight behind you."

"I don't see anything but a small bump."

"That's all it is when the tide is full," she said.

A silence ensued—the silence of dipping oars and the splash of water. Finally Richard said:

"I think, if you'll permit it, I'll stop 'missing' you and call you Dorcas. May I do so?"

She considered this studiously, while her smiling eyes showed a new awareness of him. Then she nodded.

"Of course you may. We *have* been formal, haven't we?"

"Impeccable," he agreed, and added earnestly: "Dorcas, your star boarder's name is Richard."

"I know that," she laughed.

"Do you think you could say it?"

"Perhaps."

"You *are* a sedate little lady!"

"I sedate!"

This struck them both as immensely preposterous, and they laughed again. Richard had been wanting to laugh this long time. It lent a legitimate outlet for the joy pulsing rapturously within him.

He bent industriously to his oars after this interval, and presently they were alongside the protruding rock. A dozen gulls, perched on its serrated sides, watched them approach with bright, arrogant eyes.

"We'll climb up there and sit down," he said.

"There's not much room."

"There's enough," he assured her.

They felt the skiff's keel grate on the rocks. Richard hopped out and pulled the nose of the boat after him.

"Now, give me your hand and—jump!"

The next instant the girl was standing beside him.

"She's in shallow water," Dorcas told him. "When the tide turns, she'll be left high and dry, so we mustn't stay out here too long."

"Oh, we can get her off, all right!"

They scrambled to the pinnacle of the rocks, laughing, exulting in their adventure. Richard spread his coat for Dorcas to sit on, and they settled themselves side by side, their arms hugging their huddled knees.

The sun had left them, and the western horizon and the distant shore of the mainland were washed in brilliant color. With her chin resting on her locked fingers, the girl sat brooding, while Richard regarded her contentedly.

There was something almost poignantly young about her, with her bright hair rip-

pling about her temples and clinging to her slender throat. She was a beautiful girl, he decided dispassionately, and presently she would be a beautiful woman. She needed no subtle artifices. How many women would look as enchanting in a gingham frock?

"Look!" she commanded softly.

He followed her glance, and saw that the moon, which had been hovering pallidly above them, was now riding forth, seeming to preen herself as she brightened. In the paler light, the circle about them seemed to decrease. Their world grew smaller, more intimate.

"It's as if we were in a royal tent and this was the throne," mused Richard, quite under the spell of the night.

"Like some ancient king," supplemented the girl, smiling.

"And his queen," added Richard promptly.

Oh, but this was delicious nonsense!

"A queen in a gingham dress?" she scoffed.

He turned to her, a gallant retort on his lips, but it died stillborn. His eyes met hers, wide, luminous, with a little abstracted smile in their depths. His face sobered. A puzzled wonder replaced his jovial grin—a wonder that merged into a startled horror. The inexplicable ecstasy that had seemed to emanate from all the subtle forces of nature around him, the rapture that had colored his world during these last few weeks, drained itself slowly, relentlessly into the depths of those serene eyes, leaving him stripped and chilly.

He dragged his eyes away, to stare out over the flat expanse of water, and over a world bereft of life and color, even as he was bereft. He understood now the secret of his ecstasy. Dorcas! And he had not even guessed that he loved her. Loved her! He, Della's husband, he who had no right to love any one!

"I think we had better start back. I'm afraid it'll be pretty dark as it is."

Her voice seemed to come from a great distance, from the inaccessible place to which she had retreated now that he understood. He dared not look at her, but he said unsteadily:

"Oh, let's not go yet. The moon will think we're deserting her."

"But it's getting dark."

"You're not afraid?"

"Of course not."

"Then"—he forced the words to come playfully—"let's stay out a bit longer, and pretend that this is our particular tent."

When it was dark enough for him to see only the pallid outline of her face, he turned to her and began to talk feverishly, about the night, the moon, the city—anything, so that he might keep her there, so that he might listen to her voice and watch the movement of her lips.

He was aware that this was the end—that he must leave Standish, must place miles and more miles between himself and the agonizing sweetness of her presence; but he would take enough of her away with him to last forever. He would tuck it away deep, deep, secure from the sordid contacts of life. Sometimes, in the lonely years ahead, he could take out his memories and feast upon them, as one pores over some faintly fragrant album.

For some reason which neither could have explained, their voices were hushed. Once Richard changed his position. In moving, he felt her bare forearm against his sleeve. The contact left him shaken. He told himself that he must not touch her; but her voice, her nearness—these he might take.

"We must start," she said again. "I'm afraid it's awfully late."

But he refused to consult his watch. Tomorrow he must go, but to-night—surely no one would begrudge him this much!

So they stayed on, while the moon moved pompously in her slow arc, and a chill breeze blew up out of the east. At last she rose, stiffly, purposefully.

"Goodness, I've been sitting in one position for so long that I'm all kinky!"

Their laughter was a little strained.

"Must we go?" he said wanly.

"Goodness, yes—and look!" A hundred feet of rock lay between them and the open water, and perched midway was the skiff. "Low tide!" she cried. "Now we've done it!"

"Oh, we can get her off," Richard assured her.

But dragging the boat across that jagged slope proved no easy task. They began by lifting her outright, but she was a stout little craft, and the girl's strength did not match her willingness.

"You sit down and boss the job," Richard commanded, and set to work alone.

He accomplished a foot or so at each effort, while Dorcas encouraged him from her

perch on the rock. They launched her finally, after more than half an hour's work, and climbed in, panting.

"Now we'll both row back," announced the girl firmly, "because we shall be pulling against the tide, and that's hard work. We must be careful of the rocks on the way, too."

If it was hard work, Richard was unconscious of the fact. He knew only that Dorcas was beside him, that her long, clean strokes matched his, that they were pulling together with perfect accord. There was a sharp sweetness in this fact—it would swell his album of memories.

"I should have known better than to stay out so late," she said, and her self-disgust was shot through with a puzzled wonder at her strange deflection. "It isn't as if I didn't know about the tides and all."

"Oh, we'll be home presently," Richard assured her. "I hope you're not worried about having stayed late. I should feel very guilty if you were."

"No, I don't think it matters," she mused. "Of course, if dad had been home, he'd have been fearfully upset."

The stars had begun to pale when they approached the beach. Richard wondered vaguely where the hours had gone. It had seemed so short, their last night together, and yet dawn could not be far distant.

He was conscious of a sharp stab of guilt when they found that their worst problem was before them. The tide had left the little inlet dry, and in vain they pulled out of one muddy shallow, only to run aground in another.

"I'm afraid it's dead low," the girl said finally. "There's no place here where we can put ashore, if it is. We had better row up to the sluice."

This meant another half hour of hard rowing, for the sluice, where the fishermen kept their boats, marked the easternmost point of the village; but they yielded to necessity, and pulled off toward the sentinel fir trees that marked the channel.

The moon had strutted off, leaving the stars in full command; and these were already winking sleepily out when Richard made out the cluster of boats and the wharf ahead. They tied the skiff among her larger sisters, and climbed the wooden steps leading to the road. They started walking swiftly, for the sluice was a good half mile from the old Stayton house.

"What would dad say," asked the girl, with a nervous laugh, "if he knew I'd been out this late—almost all night?"

"He'd be sure to understand," said Richard reassuringly.

"But dad knows that I know the tides," she told him.

Richard's guilt was overwhelming him.

"I'm fearfully sorry," he said. "I don't know why I was such a thoughtless brute!"

"But it was my fault as much as yours."

She stumbled against him, and he crooked his arm.

"You're tired, too. Take my arm, and we'll make better time."

She slipped her hand under his arm, and he felt it pressing warmly against his side—felt it with a strange, detached sweetness, for in his heart he had already said goodbye to her.

Through the rising mists of the oncoming dawn they trudged down the road. Presently the sun would rise, as it had risen yesterday, and the world would yawn and stretch itself, pick up the threads it had dropped the night before, and do the same thing over and over with its vast, immutable serenity.

"What time is it, please?" she asked, when the house loomed ahead mistily.

"Nearly three, Dorcas."

She gasped as they started slowly up the gravel walk toward the back door. With his hand on the knob, he turned to her. Her buoyant self-reliance had deserted her. In the pale light she looked like a sleepy, befuddled child. Her hair and frock were rumpled and her eyes drooping.

"You're not sorry, Dorcas?" Richard gently asked her. "Or shall I apologize for keeping you out like this?"

"But you didn't," she protested. "It was my fault, too." She appealed to him, with the ghost of her merry smile coming into her eyes. "I don't know why I stayed on like that, except that it seemed as if I must—as if I couldn't leave. It was so beautiful, wasn't it?"

"So beautiful," he murmured, "that I shall never forget it—never! Good night, Dorcas!"

"Good morning, rather—Richard!" she rejoined, and tiptoed across the dim kitchen toward the stairs.

They felt their way up the stairs, and exchanged another good night at her door before she slipped inside and closed it softly. As she closed it, another door down the

hall opened swiftly, and Rose Ruby's face appeared in the aperture like a disembodied mask, her hooked nose and sharp chin meeting over her yellow smile.

For a moment the old woman hovered in the shadow, listening to Richard's fumbling steps coming down from the tower stairs, and to the cautious movements of the girl in the next room. Then she disappeared, as quietly and as swiftly as she had appeared, like a triumphant *Judy* hauled in by the marionette operator from behind.

VII

OLD Peter returned, grumbling but enormously pleased with himself, on an early train the next day. He was voluble and bitter in his complaints about the train service.

"Mind you, only one train back in the evenin', and that never on time! If ye miss it, there's nothin' to do but wait till mornin'."

Dorcas knew the tale, and accepted it once more with expressions of sympathy. With her arms around his neck, she snuggled against his coat, while he held her closely.

"But you did have a good time, dear heart, and you *did* get your put-put!"

"Oh, I'm too old to have good times any more," grumbled Peter; "and I shouldn't be surprised if that engine was more beautiful than useful."

"Well, it 'll save you. You won't have to row any more, so you'll have no more trouble with your back."

"A lot you know about it!" scoffed Peter. "That there pain in my back ain't got rid of so easy. Besides, it's a good thing to have now and agin. How do you s'pose I know right now that there's a sou'easter blowin' up?"

"I expect you'll say you know by the pain in your back."

"Pre-cisely!" gloated Peter, and glanced about the kitchen. "Where's our star boarder?"

"He went to town, I think."

"And what's my girl been a doin' with herself?"

"This is Friday, daddy. What would I be doing but cleaning the parlor?"

"Now look here—why don't you get Rose Ruby to do that, like I been tellin' ye to?"

"She doesn't do it to suit me."

"A reg'lar old maid!" he accused fondly.

"And we could have some lettuce and tomatoes for dinner, if there was only some one to pick them," she mused.

Peter bristled.

"Now listen, young woman! I want to splice that engine on an'—"

"But that 'll wait! Do go out and find me some tomatoes—nice red ones!"

He held her off, taking a long breath in preparation for the harangue he was longing to deliver; but he spoke solicitously instead.

"You're lookin' peaked, kitten. Ain't sick, be ye?"

"You know I'm never sick, dad."

"Look peaked, all the same," said the old man obstinately, and started for the door. "If you don't put that lazy bag o' bones to work, I will!"

He bent to his task in the garden, soothed by the spicy scent of the tomato vines, chuckling to himself as he peered beneath the leaves. She hadn't asked him what he had brought her from town—pretended that it didn't matter, when she knew well enough that he never made a trip without bringing her back some gewgaw from the shops. Little minx!

He was twisting an enormous red tomato from its stalk when he was conscious of a shadow falling on the green leaves before him. He raised his head to meet the cunning, myopic gaze of Rose Ruby.

"Blame me, how'd *you* get there? You get inside in a hurry, and help Dorcas with her cleanin'."

"I guess like she needs help to-day," grinned Rose Ruby, without moving.

"She always needs it, and that's what I pay you fer, see? Get, now!"

"But to-day"—the old woman produced one of her inimitable grins—"I s'pect she needs it more'n mostly. So would you, if you hadn't had no sleep!"

"No sleep!" He rested back on his heels, peering up at her anxiously. "Didn't Dorcas sleep last night? Were she sick?"

"How do I know?"

"Well, hang it, don't ye?"

"How could I, when I warn't there to see?"

"But see here, ye rattlin' bag of bones, I told ye to stay to my house all night, 'cause I might not get back. I *didn't* get back, and—"

"An' so I did. I stayed all night," said Rose Ruby, with a cackle. "I wuz there!"

"Well, then—"

"But Dorcas, she warn't!"

"Warn't what?"

"Warn't here—in the house."

Peter rose slowly to his feet, more puzzled than disturbed at this curious recital.

"What do ye mean? If she weren't in the house last night, where was she?"

"How should I know?"

He made a swift lunge toward the old harridan.

"Blame me if I—"

"Well, how *should* I?" repeated Rose Ruby, backing away from him. "I only know she come in nigh onto sunup—dawn, it was."

He regarded her blankly for a moment, his little bright eyes almost disappearing in the confused cloud that enveloped him. Rose Ruby was quick to follow up the advantage his silence gave her.

"They was somewhere all night—I don't know where they was."

"They?" echoed Peter.

"Dorcas an' that man in the tower—the boarder—*Mr. Brown*."

The great frame towered there for a moment as quiescent as the immutable serenity about him. Then the old woman's words shaped themselves into hideous form. His body began to heave and his arms shot up and out.

"I'll kill ye fer that!" he shouted. "I'll kill ye fer that, ye lyin', blaspheming old hag! I'll kill ye!"

She moved off, keeping her eyes on his distorted face, and moving her cracked lips in a perfect frenzy of triumph.

"I tell ye it's the truth! Didn't I see 'em come in with my own eyes nigh to dawn? Didn't I see 'em comin' down the road arm in arm? If ye don't believe me, go up to the sluice—her boat's there. Warn't low tide at three this mornin'? An' would she take her boat 'way up to the sluice if she could 'a' brought it back to the beach? Don't that prove I ain't lyin'? Go up to the sluice an' see fer yourself, if you don't believe me!"

"I'll kill ye—kill ye!" he was muttering, but the words were mechanical.

He faced the old woman across the crumpled tomato plants that his heedless feet had broken and trodden into the soil, and beneath his ragged mustache his teeth were chattering.

"I tell ye it's so! She was out all night with that man, an' the whole town 'll be talkin' about it soon!"

He made a dozen futile efforts to speak, and at last the words scraped their way up from his throat.

"Then it's because ye told 'em. Ye lie! I'll kill ye!"

She turned and hurried through the garden and across the fields toward her crazy little shack, with her ragged skirt flapping about her bony limbs, and her yellow smile much in evidence.

Peter paused within a few feet of the white fence that girdled his garden, and stood with the strained, insensible immobility of a mechanical toy suddenly run down. His senses were floundering uncertainly among the morass of words that had fallen from the old woman's mouth. He would kill her!

The whole village was talking about it, she said. Well, that was because she had lied. His girl—his Dorcas—out all night with a man! Preposterous!

Yet if it were so—well, she might have been out in her boat, and might have been becalmed. Then he remembered that she could not have been sailing.

What had the old hag said about the sluice? That the skiff was there. Well, if it was there, it meant that she couldn't get to the beach because it was low tide. Low tide was at three o'clock in the morning, or between three and four.

He was striding now, still without the consciousness that he was moving, down the road. He covered it with great long paces, the visor of his old cap standing out over one ear. Neighbors called to him as he passed the cottages, but he did not hear. It was as if all the enginery of his mind had stopped until he could prove the fallacy of the old hag's tale.

At the bend in the road he quickened his steps. Not in years had he walked so rapidly, and his heart was pounding.

A few fishermen were about the wooden wharf, pottering with their boats. Peter returned their greetings mechanically. His eyes flashed over the tied cluster of boats, and, through a speckled red haze, came to rest finally on his daughter's skiff.

"Hear ye went up to New London to buy a engine off Tad Bowen yestiddy," ventured Tim Woodhouse, who was industriously scraping the peach bloom off his lobster crates.

But Peter was already making his way back up the road, cursing at the zigzag curves that had suddenly appeared in it.

"Guess old Pete must 'a' been dippin' into Tad's cider pretty good," hazarded Tim, and went back to his crates with a chuckle.

It was a long walk back to the white house. The sun poured hotly down upon the old man's head, and the way was strangely beset with twists and turns. The neighbors, seeing him stagger past, nodded sagely. Old Pete Stayton off on a spree at his age!

The sun could do queer things to a man. It seemed to set things on fire in him. Queer thoughts flared up—thoughts of the old gun propped on the mantle behind the stove. It was a good gun!

Well, her boat had been in the sluice. She had been out all night with the boarder—with Mr. Brown, as he called himself; but his real name wasn't Brown. Well, it didn't matter now. Peter gave vent to a sinister, unholy chuckle.

Like a buzzard circling around and around its grisly objective, so Peter's thoughts circled around and around the horrible facts he had learned. The nearer he approached to them, the more horrible they appeared. His daughter—and the man he had taken in! No wonder she had looked "peaked" that morning! No wonder she had forgotten to ask for her present from the city!

He was nearing the house, lying calm and white and tranquil in the midday peace. Something of his sanity returned to him at sight of its familiar lines. For nearly two hundred years it had stood there. It had harbored his father, and his father's father before that. Never had doubt or suspicion found the Stayton home a salutary breeding spot—never until now!

He brought up short before the house, shaking, half mad, his thoughts rushing wildly ahead to the gun that lay behind the stove. Caution, he told himself—he must use caution!

Dorcas met him at the door, and raised horrified hands at sight of him. The perspiration was rolling down from under the old man's cap and trickling from the end of his nose. His little eyes were threaded with skeins of blood, and his hands were shaking.

"Father, now *where* have you been? Here I send you out to pick tomatoes, and you go traipsing off to town or somewhere—and dinner getting cold!"

"Hello, cap'n!" greeted Richard, from

the table. "Dorcas and I thought you were lost."

So the stranger called her "Dorcas" now, did he?

"No, I warn't lost."

Peter was oddly subdued. He went to the sink, washed his hands, and splashed water on his hot face.

"Now, father, do hurry!"

"I'm comin', girl—I'm comin'."

He sat down, and she brought him a heaped plate from the oven, where she had been keeping it warm.

"Richard picked the tomatoes, or we'd have had none." So it was "Richard" now, was it? "And some clumsy creature has been trampling down some of our best vines, too!"

Peter made a pretense of eating, and moved his knife and fork about his plate with quite a clatter, but this did not deceive the girl.

"Daddy, I'm afraid you celebrated too much last night."

"Oh, ye think so, do ye?"

He was careful not to raise his eyes from the table.

"You're not eating your dinner."

"Oh, I'm eatin' enough."

He realized now that his guest was unusually quiet, and spoke very softly, very suavely.

"Ye don't seem very chipper to-day, Mr. Brown. Ain't feelin' bad, be ye?"

Richard's eyes wandered past the girl, past her father, to the fields beyond. The old pinched look of frustration was about his thin lips.

"I'm none too chipper, cap'n," he said evenly. "You see, the fact is, I shall have to be getting back to the city very soon. I find that I must leave your fair village to-morrow."

Peter's fork fell with a clatter to his plate. It was like a sharp cry in that wilderness of silence. After a moment the old man raised his eyes furtively, and saw that his daughter's color had faded, that her eyes were wide and startled.

"You're—going away?" she faltered thinly.

Richard nodded, apparently absorbed in his plate.

"Oh, be ye, Mr. Brown?" asked Peter gently. "Be ye, now?"

"Lord knows I don't want to," said Richard, with an effort to make his voice sound casual and hearty. "I can't tell you

how happy I've been here with you. I don't think I've ever been happier anywhere; but"—he shrugged—"we can't be happy all the time, I suppose, and I must get back to my duties in town."

Peter was nodding thoughtfully, and once or twice his eyes wandered to the mantle behind the range. It was a meal of strange, pulsating silence, like the silence of the sea, which even then was ominously quiet as it watched a series of slow, drab clouds mobilize in the eastern sky.

When Dorcas began to clear the table, Peter stood in the doorway, his lips and fingers moving uselessly, his eyes on those approaching clouds. So the stranger was going away, was he, going back to the city, leaving his girl stripped of her good name and of her happiness?

Dorcas was moving silently and with lagging steps about her work. That was what they always did, the city man and the country girl. Then, suddenly, Peter was lashing himself with reproaches. It was his fault! He had taken the man in—a stranger, just for a whim. He had exposed his daughter to the danger of that daily contact. *He* was to blame!

What was there to do, save kill the man?

(To be continued in the April number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

His head swam. What did the Bible say? "Thou shalt not kill!"

Suddenly he laughed. It was a ghastly sound breaking through the girl's preoccupation. She turned toward him quickly.

"Did you speak, father?"

"Yes," he said, and laughed again.

"Yes, I spoke, Dorie. I was jest remembering that I had some business uptown. I'll be back fer supper, though."

"But it's going to storm, dear."

"Yes," assented Peter softly. "You're right, girl. It do look like dirty weather."

A moment later he was plodding up the road. Behind him the marshaled clouds advanced. A chuckle churned its way up through his throat. A fine night it would be! A fine night for a wedding—for such a wedding! Oh, the city man might be smooth, but he was no smoother than old Pete Stayton, when driven to defend his two most precious possessions—his pride and his daughter.

He had thought of killing the stranger. Murder was still in his heart; but you couldn't marry a dead man. Not that Richard wanted to marry his daughter; but there was the pistol—and a pistol was a good persuader!

TO A DISCONSOLATE BEAUTY

LOSE not that face we all adore,
That face in momentary eclipse;
A thousand lovers watch and wait
To taste that honeycomb, your lips;
Nor, spendthrift, give to time and fate
Those eyes of May, nor close the door
On bloom and joy that wait for you
With singing seas and skies all blue.

Give not to Death, that hungry lover,
The flowers the whole world's bees hang over,
Waiting to drain
All your strange sweetness yet again.

It were too sore and too condign defeat
To be a bankrupt of all the whelming sweet
Still in your heart and in your ivory breast.
Oh, wake and listen, and give heed to this—
Myriads are waiting, sad-eyed, for your kiss,
And the wide earth is waiting for the rest
Of the deep beauty that abides in you,
Still and forever made of stars and dew!

Richard Leigh

Wanted—A Palace

A FOOTNOTE TO THE HISTORY OF A RECENT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

By Oma Almona Davies

THIS world is the most amazing and enchanting place! Everything is amazing, everything is enchanting, when one is not quite eighteen, and is adventuring for the first time in a foreign city. If the city be Genoa, with its perfume of orange and citron and jasmine, with bells, bells eternally chiming, with its iridescent houses, its antique sea, its fortified hills—

Everything is amazing, everything is enchanting, but everything is terrifying, too, when one is not quite eighteen.

Sidony Maril hesitated, as usual, on the landing of the staircase of the Grand Hotel of All Nations, and excitedly surveyed the weaving throng in the court below. They wove the same tale for her every night—a thrilling tale punctuated by the exclamation points of the evening suits, by the dashes and flaring commas of the dinner gowns. It took courage to interject herself into the midst of that colorful epic, the sound of which rose to her like a complex chant—her, who couldn't contribute a syllable!

"Maril?" Sidony started as she heard her father's name, and raised her eyes to two ladies who had paused on the landing near her. "Yes, that Chesterfield-looking person standing there by the fountain. Really, that's what they do call him—the Chesterfield of the conference. Have you heard the rumor that he's going to open the Pontormo palace for some sort of an affair? Wouldn't that be—"

"The Pontormo? Open again—to the public?" Her companion gave a skeptical chuckle, and shook her auburn head emphatically. "The Pontormo will never be opened—not while the old duke is living. Not even your wonderful Maril could get foot inside the Palazzo Pontormo. I know Genoa!"

"And I know Maril—at least, by reputation!" The other laughingly insisted. "Whatever he wants, he—"

They were two steps below Sidony now—three—four—

Like a hungry wren, she fluttered down the staircase behind them. At the bottom she picked up another crumb:

"No, he isn't married. At least, his wife died a long time ago—an American, they say, and—"

Well, Sidony knew that, of course. She stood for a moment staring after the auburn-haired lady with something of pity. As if any one lived who could deny her father a palace, or anything else! Then she threaded her way toward him.

He was talking, as usual, to a group of diplomats. She sat down on the rim of the fountain behind them.

The fountain splashed. Her heart seemed to splash with it, and with each splash to send warm, pink tides of pride swirling upward into her cheeks as she sat and stared at this monumental father—stared down the well cut length of him, from his close hair sweeping back from his forehead to his narrow, nervous feet. And with the pride there was a tiny ache of jealousy that every one else seemed to know this strange father better than did she.

For he was a stranger to her. How many times had she seen him? A dozen, perhaps—this marvelous creature who had come stepping across seas to visit briefly with her, sometimes in the winter at Mme. Erkley's School, near Baltimore, sometimes in the summer at Aunt Martha's, in the Catskills. This time, as an incredible graduation gift, she had been invited to accompany him to the international world conference at Genoa.

He looked worn, troubled, Sidony thought, during this second week of the conference. If she could only be of some service to him!

A young aid approached. Maril withdrew from his companions. The two faced the fountain.

"I regret to report, sir, that the Palazzo Pontormo is not available. The duke remains entirely unsympathetic, and insists that the palace should remain closed."

Then Sidony saw a new Maril—a Maril with a sudden cleft between his eyebrows, a Maril with arms folded in judgment, a Maril with a bitter edge in his voice:

"It seems incredible! When the world is dying—black and blue from its hurts—men are criminal when they refuse to aid in whatever way they can. Luckily, this is a trivial matter; but the point is that such an attitude is as reprehensible as if the issue were an important one."

Some one tapped his arm, and he turned away. The aid disappeared. Sidony still sat, straining forward. Then he *had* been refused! Who was this man who had dared to refuse him?

A fever flush of anger filled the faint hollows of the girl's temples, brushed her cheeks, and lay in the hollow of her chin. Her outspread fingers beat like futile wings against the unyielding medieval rim of the fountain.

II

It is an amazing and enchanting thing to dine each night with the Chesterfield of a great international conference; but it also devolves much responsibility upon a young lady who aspires to be entirely proper and superlatively entertaining. If one is perishing from curiosity, and yet knows that Mme. Erkley would never sanction any expression of it—

The delicious *fritto misto* had been served, and Sidony, taut on the edge of her chair, one hand clenched in her lap, was taking intense little bites, before the first thin wedge of opportunity edged into her father's affable conversation.

"Oh, yes!" Sidony answered his question earnestly. "I do like Genoa very, very much; but it is different from Baltimore and the Catskills, isn't it? A little frightening"—she groped for a more adequate word—"a little remote." And then, in a breathless rush: "The palaces—the palaces are so large—"

She had said the word. She had flung her tiny challenge; but her father caught another word and tossed it back to her on the edge of an approving chuckle.

"Remote! That's just the word for Genoa. So you felt it!"

His eyes, flatteringly appreciative, rested upon her. As if the word had been a key, nicely fitted, which unlocked a chamber in his mind, he began to talk. He talked as the Maril of the conference talked, his words eager yet precise, his gestures boyish in their swiftness, yet entirely organized. Sidony felt that she could almost see his mind darting upon his thoughts, lashing them into words.

"It's the most remote city in the world. There's a place in Tibet, and one in Java—but no! One would become *en rapport* there sooner than in Genoa. Why? Who knows? Her great age, perhaps. Her isolation, perhaps, backed up here between sea and mountains. And then her history—self-contained, self-sufficient; and to think"—he clipped off his words characteristically with his brief smile—"that my little American girl sensed all this!"

Oh, it was wonderful when his keen eyes danced approvingly like that! It made one entirely reckless.

"Papa!" She hadn't meant to say it. "The palace—there was some palace—out there by the fountain—you wanted it—the Pon—Pon—"

"Oh, the Pontormo? Yes." His eyes brooded away from her. "You see, my dear, there must be some beer and skittles in every phase of life—even in this tough old diplomatic game; and perhaps all the more because it is tough and old and diplomatic. The economic pot has been boiling hard—reparations, boundaries, exchanges—rather hot stuff. If it doesn't get cooled off, it may set the whole world on fire. If this meet is not a success, there will be conferences and conferences and conferences, and all their wind will only fan the flame."

His eyes became introspective again. Sidony's arm shot pleadingly along the tablecloth.

"The point is, my daughter, that this is the psychological moment for a little social breath. I've an idea it's not such a trivial matter as it might perhaps appear. A single hour has changed many a chapter of history!"

"A reception! How splendid!" Sidony

cried, and added with some pride: "You see, I know all about receptions. Mme. Erkley always lets the graduating class have one. There are ices and little cakes, and every one is in very good humor. Oh, it's a wonderful idea! But won't Mr. Pontormo—the—the duke—"

For a moment Maril's quick smile lighted his dark features.

"You little American! No, Mr. Pontormo won't. Mr. Pontormo is an old, old man, and he has renounced the world and the flesh, including international conferences, and has given himself over to the devil—the devil of bitterness and of self-imposed loneliness. His palace is the one I wanted for this affair that I have in mind. It has the largest private salon in Genoa, hanging balconies, marvelous terraces, a roof floored in marble, with a view—during this moon—"

He had risen now, and was waiting for Sidony to pass before him.

"Oh, well, it's a very minor issue. I am on a committee to-night. Shall I help you find Mrs. Bates-Smith?"

"I think he is a—~~an~~ old—conundrum!" Sidony recklessly blazed forth the term which had once brought upon her a day of penitential bread and milk at Mme. Erkley's. "Oh, if I only, only had a palace!" she added, with her serious chin uptilted.

From the door of the salon, they discovered Mrs. Bates-Smith embroidering in her accustomed corner. Since poor Aunt Martha had been detained in the Catskills by a sprained ankle, Mrs. Bates-Smith had become Sidony's chaperon. She was one of those hybrid Americans of uncertain age whom one finds embroidering in salons here and there over Europe—women who have vaguely renounced the land of their birth, and as vaguely adopted some alien city as their own; just as the hermit crab, at a certain stage of its existence, crawls from its native shelter and complacently ensconces itself in the shell of some whelk or other mollusk.

Two other ladies were with Mrs. Bates-Smith this night—wives of secretaries, whom Sidony had met. As she approached, she heard:

"About sixteen, I think."

"Not more than that, I should say. Very immature—"

Sidony realized, with a shock, that they had been speaking of her. As she slipped into a chair by the side of Mrs. Bates-

Smith, a questioning hush fell, followed by conscious vivacity on the part of a secretarial lady:

"Oh, and I must tell you! I did the Palazzo Cecchi this morning. Such wonderful paintings! Have you been there, Miss Maril?"

Sidony murmured a negative. She sat, as tall as she could, on the edge of her chair. She wanted to scream:

"I am almost eighteen! I am almost eighteen!"

She had known that she was criminally young, but to be taken for sixteen!

"You must see it. The terraces—lovely! Frescoes—staircases—orangery—"

Sidony had turned for comfort to Mrs. Bates-Smith's nose. It was remarkably like Aunt Martha's, with its little hump on the end. She swallowed and clenched her hands.

Then, because she knew she wasn't being polite, she made a conscious effort to be attentive. Her mind leaped back over its lapse, picking up phrases she had not known she had heard:

"Frescoes—terraces—enormous salon—"

Her eyes suddenly widened. She started forward.

"Does it really have terraces and an enormous salon?"

The sprightly raconteur, who had bounded some seconds before from the Palazzo Cecchi to the Monte Righi, and thence to the monuments in the Campo Santo, also widened her eyes, while her brain and her tongue hung suspended. It was Mrs. Bates-Smith who spoke, as her habit was, without raising her eyes from the fuchsia she was forcing into mercerized bloom.

"Oh, yes, my dear! The Palazzo Cecchi is one of the very lovely places in Genoa. I think its porcelains can scarcely be surpassed."

Sidony's eyes wandered over the tapestried walls of the salon, over its lofty, painted ceiling; but her mind was off on a new and tantalizing journey of its own.

III

MRS. BATES-SMITH did not figure largely in Sidony's plans the following day, though the girl did look for her, after luncheon, as a sort of vague propitiation to Aunt Martha. Poor Aunt Martha, past worthy grand matron of the Order of Chaperons!

She found Mrs. Bates-Smith embroidering by the side of the fountain in the court.

Her needle was pricking into life a leaf the like of which never grew on any known variety of fuchsia. Her nose was heartbreakingly like Aunt Martha's to-day, with the hump in it touched by a rosy ray from the stained glass roof above.

Sidony moistened her upper lip.

"Genoa seems such a quiet place! I was just wondering if one would be safe—for a stroll—"

Mrs. Bates-Smith had this in common with the other hermit crabs—she was extremely tenacious of her adopted whelk, and extremely vigilant in protecting it. She now laid her embroidery in her lap, terrifyingly folded her hands upon it, and looked at Sidony.

"Genoa," she said impressively, "is the safest city in Europe, bar none. In my fifteen years here I have never heard of a misfortune to a woman of discretion, and in my next fifteen years I never expect to hear of any."

"I thought I might step into the Cecchi palace." Sidony's finger tightened in her guidebook. "It's only just off this first piazza, isn't it?"

Mrs. Bates-Smith placidly took up her embroidery.

"The Piazza Fontane Morose—first street leading off to the north, the Via Garibaldi. You couldn't possibly miss the Cecchi, my dear, for it is the only palace in Genoa with a deep cream façade. The others are all white or red or gray." She drew a speculative thread. "Of course, if you feel timid, I shall—"

Sidony sprang to her feet.

"Oh, no! At least, thank you, thank you so very much, Mrs. Bates-Smith!"

She fluttered away. Light as a bubble, she crossed the lava pavement of the Piazza Fontane Morose, and went down the Via Garibaldi, between its heavy Renaissance palaces. There it was—the deep cream façade. All the others were white or red or gray.

Sidony palpitated slowly past it, and back again to its wide flight of marble steps. She stared up at its stern immensity, and opened her guidebook. She knew the passage her numbed forefinger had been guarding, word for word; but she had an undefined sense of needing once more to look at the familiar, friendly English words. It was as if, before she surrendered herself to this frowning medieval pile, she wanted the tangible assurance that she, too, had

behind her a great race, a great history, a great tongue.

The Palazzo Cecchi will repay a visit. Open from one to three; closed on Friday, Maundy Thursday, Easter, Whitsunday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. No fee.

She closed the book and resolutely climbed the steps. She had supposed that the door at the top would be open, but it was not. It looked frightfully massive and forbidding; but the façade *was* deep cream. She tapped the gray-green dolphin's head which served as knocker.

The door was opened by a large man with a large, impassive face. He was clothed in dull livery. He did not step aside for her to enter, but stood speechless, looking at her with unblinking eyes.

"I came to see the palace," she said.

He answered in Italian, and continued to gaze at her.

Sidony felt a slight anger. Aunt Martha's servants were better trained, and Mme. Erkley's ever so much better. She elevated her chin and thrust forward the guidebook.

"I came to see the palace. These are the hours, the book says."

Again the man said something in Italian. Sidony's perplexed gaze wandered from him to another individual, of whom she had been dimly conscious as lingering in the vestibule behind the doorkeeper. This person now stepped forward and doffed his cap.

"Pardon, may I be of service? This man is saying that he does not understand English."

The speaker was evidently a tourist. His tweeds were tucked into golf stockings, and he carried a camera slung diagonally from his shoulder. He glanced from Sidony to her guidebook, and back to Sidony again.

"I came to see the palace," explained Sidony for the third time. "These are the hours, aren't they?" She added, in a little rush of verification: "Or you wouldn't be here!"

The young man spoke in Italian to the doorkeeper. Then, with a smile which showed some very good teeth, he stepped aside for Sidony to enter.

"How stupid!" she remarked. "Why should they have a doorkeeper who doesn't understand English? And why should they have a doorkeeper at all when the book says it's open to the public?"

"'Dost swear by the book?'" parried the stranger, with another flash of teeth.

Now Sidony had less than a bowing acquaintance with Shakespeare, having passed him by as lightly as was compatible with Mme. Erkley's curriculum, and she did not recognize him now. Likewise, she suddenly remembered that she had less than a bowing acquaintance with the young man who had propounded the strange question. She drew herself up to her full height, which was not very high.

"I am very grateful to you for your assistance," she said gravely, and stepped past him.

The great door clanged shut. She stood still for a moment while its hollow echoes rang around her, and in that moment centuries fell upon her. She was in a long, vaulted vestibule. Its walls were hung with armor, and its sole furnishings were huge carved chests evenly spaced along its walls. It was so entirely different from her conception of a palace that her feet lagged as she went forward. Yet somewhere in this dim pile there was an "enormous salon," "terraces"—

She paused half down the length of the gallery before a door inscribed—

SCULTURE DI BRONZO

She opened this door and took a few steps into the room. It was an oblong apartment, ill lighted. Bronze figures, large and small, stared somberly at her from the shadows. Sidony retreated, and closed the door so hurriedly that the medieval echoes rang again. She drove her feet to a door exactly opposite, inscribed—

MARMI ANTICHI

People and bits of people in very old marble lay or stood about this room—a horrid, frozen clinic of them. Sidony shuddered. The legless gentlemen, the armless ladies, the sightless eyes! And just opposite the door, prone upon a slab, a life-size young man with very curly hair—horrible natural hair in the dim light! She could see a broken nose and a broken foot, and the stump of an arm extended toward her—toward her—

Sidony suddenly found herself in the vestibule again.

Were there no visitors to-day, except that one young man in tweeds, stooping and running his finger along the pattern of a carved

chest? If only there were a woman—but there was no sound of footsteps, no sound of anything.

What if those figures on either side of her, the brunette bronzes, the blond marbles, should suddenly come to life? What if those doors between which she stood midway should slowly open, and the young man on the slab should slowly stir his mutilated limbs? There was a perfectly truthful girl at Mme. Erkley's who had seen, passing the footboard of her bed—

"Will you not allow me to assist you again? I've just been giving the place a once-over."

"Oh! Oh!" gasped Sidony.

But the young man who halted before her was not legless or armless, and his eyes were not sightless. They were extraordinarily friendly eyes, and his golf stockings were very reassuring. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, school-boy fashion, as he hesitated before her.

"I promise not to intrude, but if I could show you—"

"I came to see the salon and the terraces. The book says—"

Then, remembering the stranger's former disconcerting remark anent the book, Sidony broke off; but he did not repeat his error. Instead, he gestured formally toward the end of the vestibule and remarked:

"The state apartments, you mean? The staircase to the second floor is behind that marble fret there." And then, as they turned down the hall: "It's a peculiarity of Italian houses that the state apartments are always on the second or the third floor."

He talked very comfortably and entertainingly, and Sidony did not mind, even though other broken antique figures flanked the wide staircase which they were mounting. She was mainly occupied in wondering of what nationality her new companion was. He was not Italian, for he was decidedly fair; scarcely French—he was too robust; not American or English, for he spoke with just the faintest tinge of some accent.

"This is what you came to see, I fancy."

He lifted the flap of a heavily padded leather curtain. Sidony passed beneath the curtain, and took a couple of steps. Her palms flew together in such quick ecstasy that the guidebook fell to the floor. Even then she did not notice, but continued to gaze, entranced.

Her companion's eyes twinkled down upon her.

"It is rather corking, isn't it?"

It was a great hall, octagonal in shape, with a mosaic floor in intricate partcolored designs, and a richly coffered ceiling. Its high walls were frescoed their entire length, the colors dimmed to exquisite pastels. On either side they were broken by lofty glass windows, set in onyx framework, which yielded glimpses of fountained terraces with palms and drooping marble figures. A gallery with protruding loggias, supported by colonnades, ran about three sides of the apartment.

"Oh, it will do! It will do!"

"Will do?"

But Sidony was skipping from him toward the windows.

"And there—there are the terraces!" She spun about upon her heel and lifted her shining eyes to his as he joined her. "Oh, it will entirely do!"

The young man rubbed his cheek with a puzzled palm.

"Will do?" he repeated.

Sidony told him, then. Being a conscientious little person, she told him in full detail, neglecting neither the secretarial lady nor Mrs. Bates-Smith as she embroidered fuchsias by the side of the fountain.

"And I'm perfectly sure that this Cecchi palace will do. Why, it seems as if it couldn't be any larger, and I know there's nothing so lovely in the world! Papa must have forgotten how large and how lovely it is. I know, when I bring him to see it, he'll say that old Mr. Pontormo—the duke, you know—can just keep his old place!"

"Shall we sit down?" muttered her companion, deep in his throat. "This is a bit thick!"

They sat down, one on either end of a porphyry bench. Sidony ran her complacently appraising eyes over the details of the salon. The young man elevated his knee, clasped it tightly between both hands, and gazed at her with frowning absorption.

"There are seats enough," Sidony estimated. "Mr. Cecchi would probably bring in more, if we needed them. He's so thoughtful, papa says; but people won't want to sit much. They'll be walking around talking about those tapestries, and all those glass cases look interesting. I remember Mrs. Bates-Smith said something about porcelains. The men will like that old armor, too."

"You said something about the other—the other palace—the—"

"The Pon-tor-mo," Sidony instructed, with slow pride. "Well, I can't tell you much about it, except that it's shut up tighter than a vacuum tube. It's owned by an old man whose name is also Pontormo, and then he has other names, too, but I've forgotten them. Anyhow, he's very cross and selfish, and won't let anybody see the inside any more."

The young man's heels, suddenly released, struck the floor with a sharp report.

"Oh, I say! I wouldn't say that, you know! He may have his reasons. Suppose he were ill—paralyzed—"

"Aunt Martha's father had three strokes, and he got sweeter and sweeter until he died," returned Sidony, shaking her head.

She had never experienced such heady triumph. It exalted her above herself. She was no longer Sidony Maril, who looked sixteen and was very immature. She was a woman who had had a vision, and who was now in process of most wonderfully materializing it—materializing it for a marvelous father, for a marvelous world!

She was a little dizzy with it all, as she sat there on the end of the porphyry bench and gazed with bedazzled eyes over the room and back again to the young man. Even he, a stranger though he was, taller and older than herself, contributed to her sense of self-sufficiency. He looked so puzzled, so utterly stricken, as he sat straining at his knee, never taking his eyes from her. Sidony smiled at him brightly.

"I don't mean to be too hard on that old man," she explained; "but it's very wrong not to be hospitable toward the world when it comes to your own city."

"Perhaps," the stranger admitted vaguely, staring away from her. "But there might be reasons, you know. The world might have nicked him here and there till he got a bit sore, don't you think?"

"But it's the world that has given him all his nice things!" Sidony cried. "It's as little as he could do to let the world come and look at them when it wants to!"

"Oh, I say, you know! I don't see it that way!" The young man shot to his feet and rammed his fists into his pockets. "The world hasn't given him his treasures. His family got them—he got them—through his own efforts. The world hasn't given him anything!"

"Well, anyway," Sidony temporized, "even that way, it just looks to me like a big, strong dog that had gone out and got bones and bones, heaps of them, that it never could eat, and then won't let other perfectly nice, hungry dogs have any of them. No!" She sighed, as she looked up at him, and shook her head. "I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid he's a—an old—conundrum!"

Her companion made no reply to this. Glancing at him as he flinched his shoulder restlessly from her, Sidony had a sudden fear that she had been too emphatic. He had been very agreeable. He was very good to look at—his firm chin slightly cleft, his blue-gray eyes, his fair, careful hair.

A smile almost twisted his lips as he looked down at her again and suggested:

"Perhaps you'd care to look at some of these cabinets? Some of them are really worth while."

They spent a wonderful three-quarters of an hour, then. The new acquaintance had a marvelous fund of knowledge about enamels, wood carvings, ivories, and tapestries. Sidony's eyes grew wider and wider. She split both of her snug little gloves as she unconsciously hugged the guidebook tighter and tighter.

"If I had known how much you knew, I think I should have been afraid of you!"

They had been around the room and were standing near the leather curtain again.

He threw back his head and laughed.

"That's a good one! Now you make me hesitate to show you the marbles below. I don't want you afraid of me, you know. You'll have to promise—"

Sidony shuddered. Her serious, flushed face upturned to him pleadingly.

"Please, I don't want to see them! I—I did see them. And I must go now." She hesitated. "I wouldn't mind, though, if you would walk with me past the door where they are."

Even so, the centuries, heavy and lonely, fell upon her as she stepped off the stairs into the dim vault of the vestibule again.

"It seems strange there are not more visitors," she observed nervously. "Why, you and I were the only ones!" She lost a step, stung by the discovery. "But this was the day, and these were the hours," she justified, clutching the guidebook.

"This was the day, and these were the hours," mused the young man. Then his

lips parted over his very good-looking teeth. "But, after all, there were visitors! You were here, and I was here!"

His tone was warm and intimate. Sidony suddenly wondered if she were never to see him again—or would he ask to call? A shiver of excitement zigzagged down her spine. If Mrs. Bates-Smith and the secretarial lady could see her in the hotel salon—there in the corner by the palms—her hair done high on her head—a tall young man leaning toward her—would it not absolve her from the crime of youth?

But he did not ask to call, nor did it appear that he intended doing so. They were pausing just behind the massive front door. Sidony, overwhelmed with the necessity of making a correct farewell, became a very, very young Sidony, agonizingly uncertain. Should one shake hands? Or should one merely bow? What, oh, what should a panic-stricken girl do?

The young man seemed to have grown immensely taller. He seemed very far away, as she slowly lifted her eyes.

"I am very grateful to you for your assistance." Her lips automatically recited Mme. Erkley's polite formula. "Good-by, Mr.—Mr.—"

"They used to call me Rugby Sand at Oxford," he twinkled.

"Oh, Oxford!" Sidony repeated, with formal politeness. Ought she to say something more, or should she go? "Aunt Martha went to school at Oxford, Ohio. All girls, though."

"I see where I made a mistake in my choice of Oxfords."

"Oh, no!" Sidony gasped, horrified. "They wouldn't have let you!" She must get away! Without intending it in the least, her small hand shot toward him. "Good-by, Mr.—Sand!"

His warm hand clasped hers tightly for a second. Then he swung open the door, offering, as he did so, to call a carriage, or to walk with her to her hotel; but Sidony flutteringly declined, and went swiftly out into the sunlight.

IV

MRS. BATES-SMITH was still sitting by the side of the fountain, calmly subverting the laws of nature. Having propagated two flowers and three leaves, she was now fashioning a belated stem to uphold them. Beside her sat the deep-voiced wife of a famous diplomat.

But Sidony, being really not Sidony at this moment, but a maker of history, did not care how deep-voiced the other lady was, or how famous her husband was. She went directly to them.

"I found it!" The flame in her cheeks lighted tiny dancing tapers in her eyes. "It's just perfectly wonderful! It's just perfectly grand! Such terraces! Such a marvelous hall—so big, and such a curious shape, a perfect octagon! And then the cunning little balconies—"

"Octagon?" Mrs. Bates-Smith drew a slow thread. "An octagonal salon in the Cecchi?"

"Oh, yes—upstairs, you know, with the balconies out over it, and the tapestries hanging down over the railings!"

Mrs. Bates-Smith's needle poised motionless. She raised her eyes to the wife of the diplomat.

"The only palace in Genoa with an octagonal salon is the Pontormo; and the only salon in Genoa with an overhanging balcony is in the Pontormo," she declared, manifestly puzzled. The diplomatic lady nodded acquiescence. "Did you go down the Via Garibaldi, until you came to a palace with a cream façade?"

Sidony stared from one to the other, vaguely disturbed.

"It had a cream façade. I came to a big iron gate with a court behind it, and then I went on and up the steps—why, wasn't it the right thing to do? I rang the bell, and a man let me in."

"The Cecchi is the only palace with a cream façade," ruminated Mrs. Bates-Smith; "but the octagonal—"

The diplomatic lady shook her head.

"No—the Pontormo is cream, too. It was repainted recently. The painters' scaffolding was still up when we arrived, three weeks ago."

Mrs. Bates-Smith deliberately laid down her embroidery and terrifyingly folded her hands upon it.

"Then you were in the Pontormo," she pronounced impressively. "And it has been closed to the public for four years. How did you get in?"

"Oh! No! No!" cried Sidony a little wildly. "Oh, no—it was the Cecchi! It was the Cecchi!"

With the two surprised faces blurring into a whole circle of surprised faces before her, she sat down unsteadily upon the rim of the fountain.

"I don't mean to contradict, Mrs. Bates-Smith. I mean to be entirely polite; but, you see, it just couldn't have been the Pontormo! It just mustn't be—"

"Who let you in?" pursued Mrs. Bates-Smith. "Did you see people there?"

"No," faltered Sidony. "Oh, yes, yes! A man opened the door and didn't, and then another one did. He was a tourist. He wore golf stockings, and he showed me things—oh, please, Mrs. Bates-Smith!"

"Could it have been the son?" queried the diplomatic lady. "He's home from Oxford, I hear. His father had another stroke, and they took him up to their villa at Pegli yesterday."

"Sandro Cheriani?" pondered Mrs. Bates-Smith. "Well, I've heard he was more democratic. Still, he'd hardly—"

Sandro—Sand—Oxford—Rugby Sand!

The flame in Sidony's cheeks, which had been paling, flickered out entirely now, and, with it, the little tapers in her eyes. She tightened her hold upon the rim of the fountain and desperately flung out her last feeble defense.

"But he was fair, with gray eyes! He couldn't have been Italian!"

"There are two distinct types among the Genoese, dear," Mrs. Bates-Smith took up her embroidery. "Many of them are fair. Most of the Cheriani are. Yes, undoubtedly it was Sandro Cheriani himself who admitted you. Aha!" She glanced slyly at the diplomat's wife. "Youth! It sounds a bit romantic!"

"Oh! Oh!" moaned Sidony.

She sprang up and whirled from them. Her dress caught on Mrs. Bates-Smith's chair. She wrenched it loose, tearing it. She fled toward the staircase, followed by the deep voice of the diplomatic lady:

"Young—very intense—"

She didn't care! She didn't care how young anybody thought she was! She didn't care for anything now!

She was trembling. Her room was trembling. She threw herself across a trembling bed.

V

It was characteristic of Sidony that she sat up after a very little while, and, very straight on the edge of her chair, made herself think. She thought a great many swift little pieces of thoughts—thoughts which frayed and tangled into one another. They tangled before the background of the one

big black realization—she had ruined her father's career in Genoa.

What storm would not this powerful, outraged Pontormo nobility pull about his head? Perhaps her blunder had changed the history of the sad, dying world! What was it her father had said?

"A single hour has changed many a chapter of history!"

And then the frayed wisps of thought, winding, winding into a chain that suffocated her! She had forced her way into a man's house, an unbidden guest, an unwanted guest. Worse than that, once inside, she had announced that she had come to take possession of it, the most aristocratic palace in Genoa. Worst of all, face to face with one of its members, she had openly criticized the family. She had openly criticized the head of the house himself. She had called the Duca di Pontormo a conundrum!

When twilight came, she put on the only black dress she had—a wispy thing that she hated. Clinging forlornly to the balustrade, she went down the wide staircase into the court. The weight of the world she had ruined dragged at her ankles and caused her to pause for a second on each step of the descent.

She did not join Mrs. Bates-Smith in the salon. She pressed herself as flat as she could behind a pillar in the corner of the court. It seemed to her that its cool marble throbbed hot the instant she laid her forehead against it.

The dinner chimes, as usual, disintegrated the clustering units of the throng, and sent them drifting in other combinations

toward the dining salon. Maril's warm hand drew his daughter's icy one through his arm. Sidony opened her lips, and they stayed open, but it was because she could not have breathed otherwise.

Her father threw back his head with his characteristic brief laugh as he seated himself at their little table against the wall.

"There must be something in this notion of attracting things mentally." He unfolded his serviette. "Listen, pretty prim! You may possibly be interested in this. Did you notice that young man I just parted from, there at the door? That was Sandro Cheriani, come, like a noble Genoese, bearing gifts—which is, being interpreted, the Pontormo palace. Remember what we were talking about last night? But—is it too close in here? You look—"

Sidony's head weaved slowly to and fro. Her eyes implored him to continue.

"Well, I think that's about all there is of it. A pleasant surprise like that helps along wonderfully. It seems the old duke has placed all his affairs in the hands of this only son—a likable young chap. By the way, he has asked leave to call, so you'll meet him."

"Oh! Oh!" breathed Sidony.

Her eyes dropped shut for a moment, but only for a moment. Then they sprang open, very wide. She turned and stared speculatively across the room at Mrs. Bates-Smith, and beyond her at the secretarial lady, and beyond them both at the corner with the palms.

She believed she could do her hair high!

This world is really the most amazing and enchanting place!

ROADS

Oh, some roads are white with song,
And some with love are light—
The low lamps of crescent moons
And lips kissed at night.

Oh, some roads are white with song,
And some with silence black,
And some to watch with breathless voice
For footsteps coming back.

Oh, some roads are for the ear,
And some are for the eye,
And some to walk with breaking heart
Until the day you die.

Charles Divine

The Rules of the Game

IN AFFAIRS OF LOVE AND LIFE IT IS NOT ALWAYS EASY TO
OBEY THEM

By L. M. Hussey

MARTIN HUBBARD filled out the brief forms, presented his personal check, and received, as its equivalent, a draft for one thousand pesos, drawn against the Caracas branch of his banking house.

The letter to Grace was already written. It was in Martin's pocket, the envelope still unsealed. It took only a few seconds to insert the draft and moisten the gummed flap with his tongue. A moment later he was on the street, hailing a taxi, in which he rode to the post office. There the letter was registered and dispatched.

He had no further business down town; but even this prompt fulfillment of Grace's request did not seem to complete his obligation. It had been accomplished too easily, and too impersonally.

Of course, he could have told himself that he was under no genuine obligation at all. Rot, that! No use to say that Grace had voluntarily, by her own act in marrying Delgado, gone out of his life. Others might say that, but not Martin. She was always with him, unforgettable!

When he reached his apartment, he was annoyed to find Herbert Laidy in the sitting room, recreating himself with a fragrant panetela. As a rule, it was agreeable enough to see Herbert, but on that particular afternoon Martin would have preferred to be alone. However, he shook hands cordially.

"Bodine said he expected you back any moment," Herbert explained.

"Yes, and I'm glad you waited, Herbert," Martin prevaricated. "Sit down again. Be comfortable."

"I will. I was comfortable, old boy. I'm always comfortable here in your sanctum. The books help to make me feel at home."

He swept an appreciative eye over the crowded bookcases that flanked him on both walls. Martin smiled ironically.

"Hard to understand that, Herbert. I don't believe you ever read a book in your life!"

"Of course not. I don't care to read 'em, but I like to look at 'em. They're decorative things."

"Well," said Martin, "you do better than I, then. As decorations, they don't waste much of your time; but I guess you find plenty of other useless occupations."

Herbert fixed his friend with an inquiring eye.

"You're a bit crabby, eh?" he asked.

"Yes, I am."

"Shake out of it!"

Martin frowned.

"I intend to."

"What do you mean?"

The money—that's all she had asked for—had been sent, but for more than an hour Martin had been grappling with his sense of unfulfilled liability. Then, at that precise moment, he made up his mind as to the next necessary step.

"I mean," he replied, "that I'm cutting out of this for a while, Herbert. In a few days, as soon as I can fix up the passport nuisance, I'm sailing for South America."

Herbert was exclamatory. What in the name of the saints, he asked, had Martin to do with the greaser republics? Was it to be Buenos Aires or Rio?

"Neither—Caracas."

Herbert Laidy raised his eyebrows and whistled softly. Meanwhile he stared at his friend.

"Yes," Martin admitted, "it has to do with Grace. I've reason to believe she's—in some pretty bad sort of a mess." He paused. "And what have I to do with

that?" he continued, with sudden belligerence. "Everything!"

Herbert nodded thoughtfully.

"I suppose so," he remarked. "To a chap like you, Martin—everything. It's not the poets in this world that do the romantic things. They take it all out in talk. It's sober, solid-looking fellows like you that talk prose, but live in rimes."

"You can go to the devil!" said Martin sullenly.

Herbert Laidy was still nodding his head sagaciously.

"An incurably romantic character!" he proclaimed.

It was useless, Martin perceived, to explain to Herbert Laidy the reasons for his proposed journey. Herbert's airy mind would play with the weightiest urge as if it were a puffball. Moreover, the reasons weren't, after all, by any means clear to himself.

Martin never stopped to inquire whether he was a foolish man, a poor duffer, or even an ass—any of the pleasant names that others might fasten upon him in judgment. He knew only that in his desk was Grace's amazing letter, the first after three years, and he felt that it had placed him under a chivalric compulsion.

It was after Herbert was gone that he took out the letter and read it again. In what sort of shame, after what appalling agonies to her pride, had she written this? It was hard, terribly terse. That hardness and brevity, above everything else, revealed her emotional stress.

This was the letter:

DEAR MARTIN:

I think you can afford to do me a favor. I am in need of a thousand of our pesos, urgently. Can you send them to me? I'll repay you when I can, but I won't promise any definite time. The address is below. Don't cable. Cablegrams are so poorly handled here that the mails are more certain.

Nothing more, except her name scrawled beneath these lines.

Martin's old familiarity with the writing convinced him of its authenticity. Grace, impossible as it appeared, had really written him this distressing note—Grace, whose delicate but inflexible pride had been as characteristic of her as her small face, her eager, jetty eyes, accentuated by eyebrows orientally aslant, and the heaped abundance of her black hair. This abrupt little picture of her was to Martin a touching, pi-

quant memory, darkened by the somber shadow of her unguessed trouble.

Martin's teeth momentarily tightened. Not entirely unguessed! He could imagine that her husband, that fellow Delgado, was the prime agent in whatever disaster had overtaken Grace. It made him smile grimly, in pain, when he recalled Herbert Laidy's recent words about himself:

"An incurably romantic character!"

It was because he had been too prosy, too unromantic, that he had lost Grace. A month before they were to be married she had met Delgado, and ten days later Martin received the news that his Grace was married to the poetic Hispano-American, and on her way to the tropics.

He folded up her letter and put it in his pocket. He called his man..

"Bodine, you're not busy?" he said, when the servant came into the room.

"I can do anything you want, sir."

"Then I want you to go down town to the Red D Line and reserve a passage for me on the next steamer sailing for La Guayra. Also, look into the red tape. Find out what I have to present—passport, vaccination certificate, and all that. I'm going to give you a vacation for a month or so, Bodine."

"Yes, sir."

"All right—jump now!"

Martin felt no longer the slightest hesitation as to his course. He questioned nothing. Knowing Grace as he did, recalling her old pride, there was no other fitting response to an appeal such as she had made. True, she had asked only for money, but that was not all. Her letter meant that she was in some dire need. It meant, above all, that she must be in need of him, of some strong and kindly hand, of the stanchness of old friendship.

II

Two weeks later, however, Martin felt his first touch of doubt, of trepidation, as he crossed the Plaza to the Avenida Este, in order to commandeer one of the blistered, dilapidated old coaches. He was about to visit Grace. As yet, she knew nothing of his presence in Caracas. He had learned her whereabouts after making inquiries at the American legation. There he had talked with the secretary to the American minister.

"I don't know much about Señora Delgado," Chapman, the secretary, had con-

fessed. "I'm not sure that I've met her. She holds aloof."

"How about Delgado himself?" Martin inquired.

Chapman laughed a little sourly.

"I've heard of him."

"What have you heard?"

"Old Delgado," confided the secretary, "his father, died something more than two years ago. That wasn't very long after the son brought home his American wife. The old man left a sizable fortune. No—he was never a *politico*. Made it in coconuts and coffee. That son of his—he muddles a bit with the *politicos*, however. I've heard so."

"You're so damned cautious!" remarked Martin impatiently. "Why don't you tell me something?"

"My dear Mr. Hubbard, I have very little solid information to give you. We live in rumors, whispers around the corner. I've heard that young Señor Delgado is something of a—shall I say a bad actor? I don't know just how. Don't ask me. I think he has spent a lot of money. Now and then I've seen him breaking up glassware in the cafés. Most of the young chaps here do that sort of thing. He's present at all the turf events run off at the Hipodromo Nacional. He's a kind of sporting character. I don't know just how he's concerned with the national politics. Maybe not at all. If so, he's wise. That's a perilous game!"

It was just now, having come directly from his interview with the cautious Mr. Chapman, that Martin prepared to visit Grace. A dozen vociferous *cocheros* raged about him as he reached the file of waiting vehicles. He chose one, no less infirm than the rest, and found himself jolting over streets laid with uneven flags. The ancient springs creaked dismally under his weight. Thinking of Grace, however, he was oblivious to small discomforts.

In a few minutes, within a quarter of an hour, provided she was at home, they would meet again—after three years! What would be their first words? How would she receive him?

Naturally, he couldn't say that he had come specifically on account of her letter. She would guess that, no doubt. Furthermore, at the first meeting, they might not be alone. Delgado might be present.

Martin frowned. A fellow of Delgado's sort might easily resent the call he was

about to make, however conventionally carried out and plausibly explained. For the first time, his trip, his sudden resolution to come here, appeared quixotic, irrational.

From the distance of another continent he had seen nothing but Grace's unknown trouble, her compelling difficulties, and these had provided an all-sufficient spur to action. Now, however, he felt that her troubles, however distressing, might well be too subtle for his mending. Perhaps he could play no more than the rôle of helpless spectator to her obscure distress.

The *cochero* drove past the somber barracks in Mamey a Dolores, and, turning west, crossed an iron bridge over a small river, and drew up in the square of Delicias. The houses here were small and squat, white-walled and desolate in a relentless sunlight. The streets were almost squalid. Martin was astonished, but the *cochero*, in abominable English, assured him that this was his destination.

"Las Delicias—sí!"

The numbers were painted on the heavy doors in black letters, the paint blistered by the sun. Two naked children, scrambling in the gutter, called after Martin as he mounted the cement steps of No. 38.

A slovenly mulatto girl responded, after considerable delay, to his knock. She opened a crack of the door, presenting her dusky face and a slender segment of the dim interior.

She was dubious about admitting Martin. She understood no English, of course, but he repeated the name of Señora Delgado. Then, properly inspired, he dropped a coin into a surprisingly ready palm. The mulatto girl smiled, opened the door, and stood aside.

The house was too small for either *patio* or corridor. He was admitted into a musty *sala* from which air and light were both excluded. On the few pieces of obviously uncared-for furniture, a fine dust, gritty to the touch, had collected. Martin waited, frowning.

"You—Martin!"

He had not heard her approach. She was standing in the doorway, almost luminous, vivid, Martin thought, in that dim rectangle. Her face looked very pale. He received the abrupt impression that she was taller than he had known her to be—an illusion, of course. She made no immediate effort to approach him.

"Grace—" he began.

His tongue stumbled over some necessary, conventional phrases. He swiftly cursed himself for his inability to say them. All the time he had been planning to meet her as casually as possible, unemotionally. An absurd idea!

"I had difficulty in finding you," he heard himself saying.

She came toward him now, and took his hand. Then, turning, she went to the window and pushed back the shutter. A swift projection of sunlight, startlingly vibrant and alive, entered the dead space of the room.

"You are the first visitor, Martin," she murmured, "whom I've ever received in this room, or in this house. We've been here three months."

He was still standing.

"Please sit down," she told him.

Suddenly Martin began to speak.

"Grace," he said, "I was going to lie to you. I can't. I'm a poor fellow at subtleties—brutal, I suppose; but you ought to remember me. I won't say, then, that I came to Caracas by accident, that I had business here. The only business I have here is to find out something about you. If I chose to make the trip for that purpose only, it's my own affair. I'm lucky enough to be able to go and come as I please. I simply couldn't ignore whatever difficulty you may be in. God knows, I wouldn't interfere under almost any other circumstances; but your letter—it gave me the right, didn't it?"

He saw that small face, pale as a night-blooming flower, lifted to his own—not helplessly, however, but chilly, remotely.

"Did it?" she asked.

In her simple question Martin experienced a congealing coldness. It was as if she had accused him of some breach of faith, some caddish act. He felt himself flushing under the sting of her icy words. He saw himself, abruptly, the victim of a deplorable folly. Slowly he arose.

"I didn't—" he began.

She was out of her chair in an instant, dramatically lithe. As she faced him, she seemed almost as tall as himself.

"Oh, forgive me!" she exclaimed. "I'm silly, silly—clinging to my poor pride! I've no right to be proud with you, Martin. The money came. I knew you wouldn't fail me. It doesn't even surprise me to see you here, Martin; but you can't do anything to help me."

Her tense body relaxed, and, drooping, she sank into the chair again.

"Isn't there anything to tell?" he asked.

"No use. It's—sordid."

"You won't let me hear, Grace?"

"You want to hear? It would be a sort of revenge for you to hear, Martin. For the sake of that, I'll tell you."

But before he could expostulate, deeply hurt by her implication, she erased her words.

"No, forgive me again! I know you so well, so well. You'd rather see me happy, wouldn't you, Martin—happy!"

Her low laughter, the broken sounds, cut like knives at the stagnant air.

"Maybe it's not fair," she began.

"Maybe it's not playing the game according to the rules, to talk about him—especially to you. But to whom else, then? This is the first time I've talked. Never a word to another soul!"

She laughed again, less hysterically. How easily she had laughed in other days.

Concealing them at his sides, Martin Hubbard clenched his fists. He desired, terribly, instantly, to wipe all traces of distress, every defiling blot of obscure grief, from the life of this beautiful, beloved woman. Yes, beautiful, and still beloved! It mattered not what rules there might be in the game—he could at least admit that, tell that, to himself.

"I'll not try to explain," she was saying, "why I ran away with him, or why he made me—forget you. He was—impetuous. He gave me the promise of unbelievable romance, Martin. He was a mystery—do you understand?"

The man nodded slowly.

"I won't say that I wasn't happy in the beginning. It was gay here, Martin. They call Caracas 'the little Paris.' Ramon's father was alive then. A dear old man, poor Señor Delgado! He and I used to laugh together over Ramon when his friends brought him home tipsy from La India, or La Francia, or some other café."

She made a repugnant gesture with her slender hands.

"Why should I go on?" she demanded.

"It's well for me to know," he answered quietly.

"No, no! You can't do anything. I've no story to tell that you haven't heard a thousand times. Imagine it all for yourself—you must have imagination enough for that. When poor Señor Delgado died,

Ramon began to spend. He spent—brilliantly! He never was lucky at the races—and he never cared. He has a sort of courage, my Ramon! He can laugh. Perhaps I might still have loved him, if there'd been no more than that."

She paused, but Hubbard understood without need of words. The *cochero*, in the drive from the Avenida Este, had brought him through some of those obscure, dubious streets where, Martin comprehended, a man like Ramon Delgado would go of nights, after the cafés were closed. Martin remembered that in passing he had heard the inappropriate twanging of a guitar, the lighter tinkle of a mandolin, and the unrestrained laughter of a woman.

He stared at Grace. It seemed incredible that her fragility had been exposed to such crude shames—cruder, even, than he had imagined. She was speaking again. Why not, she asked? Why shouldn't he know everything? Confession, they said, was appeasing to the heavy heart.

"My heart," she murmured, with appalling simplicity, "is very heavy!"

She told him of the visiting singer from Barcelona—a Catalanian, half French. Grace laughed again.

"It was a romantic attachment," she said.

The Catalanian left Caracas for Buenos Aires, wearing a necklace of black pearls—and then Ramon told his wife that he had sold their home.

"We came here, then," she explained. "Pretty poor quarters, aren't they? But then Ramon says that it's just as well the lack of money forces him to stay here for a while. He says that obscurity helps him just now."

"What does he mean?"

Martin saw that the woman was frowning, but at the same time he thought he detected a shadow of fear darkening her pale face.

"He has courage—didn't I tell you that?—gambler's courage, my Ramon. Sometimes I admire him for it. Don't you know what the supreme gamble is in a country like this—the sort of gambler's chance that such a man would be bound, sooner or later, to come to?"

A bit stupidly, Martin shook his head. As Grace explained, he noticed that her voice, as if in caution, had gone lower.

"Politics!" she whispered. "The fascinating gamble for power, old friend!"

A curious flush entered her cheeks. When she spoke again, it was with lowered eyes and an inexplicable sullenness about her lips. It was as if, abruptly, she almost despaired of Martin's comprehension.

"It began," she continued, "shortly after the—the Catalanian. There was still a little money left. Ramon organized his own group. I used to hear them talking about 'liberty' and 'the people.' I could see them watching one another cynically. There was a man named Vazquez who talked louder than the rest—louder than Ramon, even. When they were about ready, he revealed himself. He admitted very frankly that he was in the pay of our president. As yet he had made no report. That Vazquez—how cynically frank he was! He made it a question of economics. For a few thousand pesos he would go to the president and report that he could discover no political activities among this suspected group. Otherwise—

"Here I am, señores," he said. 'I am in your power, *caballeros*. If you decide to kill me, you will establish your own guilt. As wise men, you will hold my life very precious to you all!'"

Grace raised her eyes, meeting Martin's gaze. Her look was defiant.

"I suppose you won't understand, Martin. I don't care! He was my husband, and he came to me. It was a question of his life, and whatever shame I felt couldn't weigh against—a sense of duty. Yes, it was a sense of duty. You won't understand, but I felt it."

"No, no!" cried Martin, feeling vicariously all the shame she must have endured. "My poor Grace, I do understand; but I had no intention of mentioning it. You mean the money. It took courage for you to ask for that. You played the game. I knew it was some dire necessity!"

"Yes, Martin, it was a dire necessity, for Ramon. Perhaps I should have turned my back upon him then, refused, done nothing, asked nothing of any one—not even you! Would that have been the sensible course? I suppose so; but—I'm not sensible, then. For one thing, Martin, he promised that, helped out of his danger, rid of Vazquez, he would drop all that tormenting intrigue. Maybe I was a little selfish. Maybe I wanted to save myself, also."

"And of course," said Martin, "he never kept his promise?"

She smiled a scornful little smile.

"No, he didn't, Martin. The sacrifice, yours and mine, wasn't worth while. They've gone on. They made Vazquez, when he received what he asked, agree to leave the country. Now it's a rubber planter below Ciudad Bolivar who is supplying the funds. Ramon, I think, provides the plan. It's very simple. Ramon explains it when he's tipsy. They'll seize the governmental offices with a handful of men. They'll imprison the president, his staff, and most of the generals. Then, without fighting, the army comes over automatically. Martin, I'm afraid! Our president is very strong, and alert. There are others besides Vazquez. My Ramon is not lucky!"

Martin Hubbard sprang up abruptly.

"Intolerable!" he cried. "First he visits you with every possible shame, and now he exposes you to an intolerable danger! What reason, what sense is there in this, Grace? It's incredible to think of you as the center of some dirty, dime novel conspiracy! You've had enough of these people and this place. I say you *must* let me help you, Grace! It's your dire necessity now—your very own. You know me well enough to realize that for myself I'll demand nothing. After you're free of all this, you can put me out of your life again, if you want to, as you did three years ago. Grace, you must leave. You must go back to the States—alone, if you like—by the next steamer. You must wash your hands clean of all this hideous mess. I'll arrange everything—everything. I want you to put yourself in my hands."

He paused, but found her silent. A bitter note entered his voice when he spoke again.

"I know," he said, "what must have been your agonies in writing to me for money. I know you too well, Grace! It was more than a sense of duty. I realize the kind of compulsion such a man as Delgado would use. I can see that he forced you—forced you to ask for it. What a shocking humiliation!"

Grace was suddenly released from her apathy. Her head was raised and tilted backward, and her black eyes gleamed with inner fires.

"No!" she cried. "He forces me to nothing! I'm stronger than he! You don't understand! Martin, I'm playing the game—I've nerve enough for that. There was

the gambler's spirit in me, too. I played for romance and happiness, and if I lost, I'll pay—pay with shame, if you like. I won't leave him, Martin! I'll see it through, to whatever end there is. You can't help. Why did you come here? You'd better go!"

He stared at her, trying to think of some compelling words, some persuasion that would save and liberate her. At that moment his long tenderness was vivified by a new admiration, an admiring conception of her foolish gallantry and courage. A gallant woman—and how intolerably he wanted her!

These two faced each other in the little *sala*, cut with that glinting diagonal of outer sunlight. Before either spoke again, a door opened and closed hastily, and a young man, slender, erect, with a thin face vividly alive, stepped into the room. Martin realized at once that he confronted Ramon Delgado. Grace was making a conventional presentation. The men did not shake hands.

For a few seconds Martin hesitated. Other than departure, no appropriate course suggested itself. He experienced a sense of terrible frustration. He bowed, murmured something incoherent to Grace, and was gone.

III

YOUNG Delgado stood just within the door, looking at his wife with ironically lifted brows.

"Interesting!" he murmured. "Your old friend, my Gracia! I remember the name. He is—rather far from home. How many times has he met you here?"

Grace shrugged her shoulders. She resumed her abandoned chair.

Slowly, with something of a panther's gliding litheness, Ramon approached and stood over her. He bent toward her until his face was close to her own.

"Ah!" he whispered. "Have you been cleverer than I imagined? Was I a fool to think there was such a thing as an innocent woman?"

He laughed.

"You play your own little games, Gracia? I—"

His voice faltered, and with this faltering the touch of savagery died on his lips. Grace stared inflexibly at the farther wall. Resolutely she refused to reply to the enormity of his implication. Now it was the

man who moved his thin shoulders in a shrug.

"At another time I'd be more—moved," he said.

His voice was almost lifeless. It startled Grace to see him seek a chair, into which he sank wearily.

"What do you mean?" she whispered.

"Be careful," he told her; "but go to the window. Keep in the shadow of the wall. Look out. By now there's probably somebody there—waiting."

With an instinct of abrupt fear, the woman hurried to the window, and glanced out. She turned to her husband with affrighted eyes.

"Who are they?" she asked.

"How many?" he inquired listlessly.

"Two men. One is staring at the house. The other is lounging near the curb."

Delgado smiled.

"They've been quick," he said. "A few more minutes, and they'd have overtaken me before I arrived here. Incautious, aren't they? From that window I could pot them easily." He sighed. "It wouldn't help. There are plenty of others."

With a few steps Grace was at his side. She grasped his arm.

"What is it?" she demanded. "Tell me, Ramon!"

"This morning," he answered, "our dear comrade, Robles, paid a visit to the president of the republic."

The woman's eyes were hugely dilated.

"You don't mean—"

"Certainly. Another one. Betrayed us—yes. Why not? He'll be paid. It's part of the game. Given the chance, I might have done it myself. Robles has won—like Vazquez. The rest of us—have lost."

Delgado began to laugh. His shoulders moved convulsively.

"Ah, Gracia, my little one, you're to be rid of me at last—rid of me at last, my jewel! Our president is a strong man. He won't bother with the prison. He'll stick to his last *pronunciamento* and order us all to be shot. A good thing—I prefer it. That's what he's sure to do, being an impatient man. A good end! Rid of me at last, Gracia! Your—what is his name?—your Martin is here. A good thing for you. He can step in, and they won't trouble you, for fear of international complications. How does it feel to be free, *mi amor*? How does it feel to know you have nothing more to endure from me?"

When he began to speak, she had listened intently, but his concluding sentences she did not seem to hear. He stared as she turned, hastily, and hurried from the room.

It was scarcely more than a few seconds before she came back. Her arms were burdened with women's things, including a black *mantilla* of heavy, almost impenetrable lace. Its fringed ends dragged across the floor.

"It's a chance," she said, speaking quickly. "A chance, Ramon! They're stupid fellows, those two. You must try now, before some one with authority and more sense arrives. Put on these things. With the *andaluza* thrown over your head, they won't be able to see your face. You can go out and pass them before their stupidity tells them to stop you. You can find some one to take you to La Guayra, and from there you can get to Trinidad. Later, when they come to search the house, they'll find no one but me. I will join you—when I hear—"

Ramon Delgado had arisen. He stared at his wife with a dark flush enlivening his cheeks.

"It might be possible," he muttered. "Maybe this is not the end!"

He met his wife's eyes.

"You have courage," he said. "You have more courage than myself. Why do you tell me to do this? Why don't you want me to be taken?"

She made no answer.

"Is it possible," he whispered, "that you still—love me?"

He saw her lips tighten.

"You want the truth?" she asked. "No—it has been a long time since I loved you, Ramon. Even love is reasonable. You know why I came here with you, to this city. I had dreams. I expected you to give me sweetness, sweet romance. You know what you've given me, Ramon. You know what you've been. Every possible shame—you've given me that! You've been drunken, silly, brutal, a spendthrift, a gambler—unfaithful. You gave me a final shame in asking money from Martin Hubbard. It seems impossible that I could ever have loved you. I know now that there was only one man in the world I ever loved!"

Ramon dropped his eyes. His hands made a faint gesture, an almost lifeless movement.

"I don't understand you," he said.

"No? You've very little time, now. Hurry! You've no time to try to understand me. Only this—I'll play to the end, Ramon! I'll stick to the last of the rules. I'll see it through. Can you understand that much?"

She picked up the tangled garments and thrust them into his arms.

"Hurry! Go into your room," she commanded. "Powder your face. Make it look white. When you go out of the house, walk slowly. It's a chance—a good chance!"

Mechanically he obeyed her. She was alone now. She could hear him moving about in the bedroom.

For an instant her head drooped, a weakness assailed her, and her resolution faltered. Why should she go on? The figure of Martin Hubbard arose before her eyes, stanch in his fidelity. In all this complex of obscure betrayals—Vazquez, Robles, and the other intriguers—why shouldn't she play a betraying part? A word whispered from the window, a softly opened door, and she would be free—free to find her lost happiness!

Then she raised her head and clenched her fingers into two small fists. She stood up; she ran quickly to the bedroom door.

"Hurry!" she cautioned.

Ramon emerged—but not in masquerade. As before, he was in his own clothes, his soft hat set over one ear.

"Good-by," he said.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

She grasped his arm, but he shook off her clutching fingers.

"I'm tired," he said. "I've lost. I couldn't go through with it. A foolish scheme! Those fellows are not such idiots. I'd never even get started for La Guayra. Why should I make an ass of myself at the end? I've gambled—now I pay up the stakes. I'm glad our president is an impatient man. No rotten prison for me! The firing squad, in the old *cuartel* in Mamey a Dolores, and a few quick bullets. It wasn't in me to love you any better than I did, Gracia, my jewel. Wish it had been. A poor assortment, you and I. You'll find a better. *Adios!*"

He strode toward the outer door.

"What are you doing?" she cried.

"Bringing you the last shame," he answered, almost savagely. "Deserting you! You can't prevent me, can you?"

Before she could seize him, he opened the

door, stepped out, and slammed it behind him. She ran toward it, fumbling desperately with the brazen knob. After what seemed an incredible time it yielded. She flung back the door and ran out.

The agents of the police had taken Ramon by either arm. It seemed that he was smiling.

IV

THE cry that rose to Grace's lips was suppressed in the fresh surprise of Martin Hubbard's sudden appearance. He came running from the corner, and in a second he was at her side. He had come back, rid of his sense of helplessness at last, to face Ramon Delgado, to demand of that youth some solution for Grace. He listened now to her swift words, almost incoherent, but sufficiently comprehensible to acquaint him with what had happened. Ramon and his captors had disappeared.

"Why did he do it?" asked Grace. "Of his own will? Why did he do it?"

"You're sorry?" asked Martin, in a low voice.

She stared.

"I don't know. I wanted—to play the whole game."

"You did all you could. Delgado was right. He did the only thing. He knew he had lost—the thing was hopeless. As he says, the president is an impatient man. A few hours now, and—after all, knowing that it was the end, your Ramon managed to put a touch of dignity into it!"

She grasped Martin's arm.

"I think so," she whispered. "Isn't it strange how easily we can forgive, after so much? In a few hours—he'll be gone, and I won't hate his memory. Strange, Martin—in his way, he might even have loved me!"

"I believe," said Martin slowly, "that in one way or another, no man in the world could resist loving you, Grace!"

He paused.

"How tired you look, poor child! What a nightmare for you! Come in. You can do nothing now. Later I'll go over to the *cuartel* and ask about—you understand. Let us go in and talk. Let us find out what we should do. Lean on my arm, Grace. Let me help you!"

He felt her drooping slenderness resting against him.

"You must help me," she whispered. "I'm ready to be helped now, Martin!"

A New England Night

WHAT BARRETT FOUND IN ARIZONA WHEN HE WENT THERE
IN QUEST OF HEALTH

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

THOUGH it seemed a far cry from selling automobile accessories in a New England city to lying with a broken leg in an Arizona cañon, Barrett's present predicament might have been traced to the excellent sales that he and his partner had made the year before—eighty-three hundred dollars net to each of them. That made him put on more steam, concentrate harder, for he was twenty-eight, and his fixed ambition was to be making ten thousand a year by the time he was thirty. A little speeding up by day, a little more taken on at night, and the goal was in sight.

Then pneumonia, a dirty stab in the back, and the doctor's inexorable verdict that he must live in the open for a few years, must seek sunshine and avoid the dour New England winters and indoor work. As yet the trouble was threatened, not actual. He was lucky not to have developed an active tubercular condition, only a general run-down state—poor resistance, nerves shot to pieces. It sounded "lucky"!

There's always one friend to whom one can spill over with a hard luck story. Two would be a needless luxury. In Barrett's case, he turned to his lifelong friend, Chase-Dull-Care Carroll, whose happy temperament had fastened his nickname on him. Barrett had written to Chase, and Chase had wired a prodigal telegram urging him to come at once to visit him at the Arizona border post where he was stationed.

"Mountains, space, air, sunshine, *ad infinitum*," the message said. "You've only seen a pale variety of sunshine. Come along and meet the real article!"

The excellent price at which Barrett sold his share of the business made him realize all the more keenly the promise of its fu-

ture. He was a man of few words and great capacity for work. To give it up made him feel as if he had suffered an amputation. He liked a tight, tidy office, furnace heat, and closed windows.

Perhaps his strongest sensation on reaching Arizona was that there was entirely too much outdoors in every direction. With all Chase's sunny optimism, he found it hard to lighten his friend's despondency.

It was the autumn tactical inspection, which meant that Chase was busy from reveille until retreat, so all he could do for Barrett was to leave him alone. The health seeker would lie for hours on a couch on the sunny porch, napping frequently, and then sleeping at night as he had not slept since he was a boy. Instead of a meal being a vexatious interruption in the busiest part of a day, it became an agreeable event, to which one looked forward and did ample justice. As the striker put it deferentially to Chase, a month later:

"The captain don't need to bother about trying to shoot quail for Mr. Barrett. He does very well by ham and eggs or a porterhouse, sir."

At first Barrett had felt too homesick for the purr of a high-powered car to accept Chase's invitation to use the Tin Camel as he liked.

"It's the only car with a gait," explained Chase breezily. "Has a gait exactly like a camel's, and makes a noise like a riot at a tinware auction!"

But when Barrett began to go out for frequent rides alone, the more he saw of the country, the more he felt the spell of its curious fascination, its austere beauty. He heard of a ranch which was offered for sale, and he decided to go to look at it. He told Chase that he would probably go on to Nogales and spend the night there.

He was so much pleased with his inspection of the ranch, so sure that it was a good buy at the figure named, and that with more capital invested in it there were big possibilities of development, that instead of going on to Nogales he had turned back to talk over the new venture with Chase.

Where all the roads looked so much alike, he had somehow made a wrong turn. As the way ahead grew steadily more rocky and difficult, he had climbed a hill to get his bearings. A still higher peak cut off the view, and he had started up its side when he had slipped on the loose rocks and fallen. When he had tried to crawl, to drag himself along the ground, covered with rocks, cactus, and every variety of *espiñas*, the intense pain in his leg made him fear that he would faint. At all hazards he must stay conscious.

He pulled out his watch again. An hour and forty minutes since he had slipped on the rocks—only that! He would see how long he could keep from looking at it again.

II

PERHAPS another hour had passed before Barrett heard the most musical and most welcome sound that had ever reached his ears—the sound of a human step, light but near.

He hallooed loudly. A boy with a gun appeared over the slope, stood still, and pointed the gun straight at him.

"Stop that, you young idiot!" shouted Barrett. "It might go off!"

"It will go off if you come a foot nearer," returned the owner of the gun coolly.

He saw that she was a girl, though the first glimpse of her, with her slouch hat, khaki breeches, dusty laced boots, and short bobbed hair, had for a moment led him to mistake her. Her khaki hunting coat, with its stained shoulder pad of sheepskin, hung slightly open, disclosing her cartridge vest with its rows of shells.

"I beg your pardon," said Barrett. "I thought you were a boy, from your somewhat casual manner of handling firearms. If I may again call attention to it, your gun is pointed straight at me. I have broken my leg stumbling on these d— I mean these loose rocks. If you will help me to my car, or go to the army post with a message for me, I will pay you handsomely for your trouble."

The young woman's gun had never swerved an inch.

"How do I know you've broken your leg?" she demanded.

In the entire course of his twenty-eight years, Barrett had never lost his temper so completely.

"How do you know? Because I tell you so, and I am not a liar! Nor am I a fool, to be sprawling in the midst of rocks and spikes and thorns for pure pleasure!"

"You may be pretending to be hurt, for all I know, and for all you've proved," returned the girl bluntly. "Very well—I'll take a chance on it. I'll send you help from our ranch, which is near. The post is thirty miles from here."

She backed off a few paces. Her tanned face was as stern as a young Diana's.

"If I hear a sound of your following me, I'll turn and shoot. I am a good shot. You have been warned, remember!"

"The damned little fool still doesn't believe my leg is broken," thought Barrett furiously.

It was intolerable to the city-bred man, it was more than flesh and blood could bear, to be left alone in that isolated cañon as the shadows lengthened. His voice sounded sharp and edged as he called after her:

"Come back! For God's sake don't leave me here! See, I'll stand up, to show you I can't!"

He made a desperate, absurd effort to stand on his one good leg, toppled over, and fell face downward. The faint he had dreaded became actual, although there was but a momentary loss of consciousness. However, he had convinced the girl, and she hurried to his aid. She took charge of the situation.

"It's getting late, and darkness falls quickly here. Put your arm around my shoulder. Use me as a crutch, you see. That's it! Hop. Hurts much? You're doing all right, but lean harder, and throw more weight on me. That's better! Rest. We'll have to rest every few minutes. Ready?"

So on—an interminable progress to the Tin Camel. Barrett was nearly exhausted, nearly spent, as she helped him into it.

"Now I'll have to go back to unloose my horse. It's not very far. I'll unsaddle him, and he'll find his way back to the ranch."

It seemed a long time to Barrett before he heard her light, quick step again. The car rattled and banged along the rocky road—the stony gully might be called a road as a matter of courtesy—and presently

swung into the highway. Once the girl stopped the car to examine the track of a heavy tire. Her face was grave and troubled, but she said nothing.

As they turned in at a cattle guard and neared a long, low adobe house, she spoke for the first time.

"This is our ranch," she said. "I'll go in and send my brother Jim to help you, in case you would like to rest a little before he takes you on to the post."

A few minutes later she came back alone. All the spring seemed gone from her.

"Jim isn't here. There's nobody but me. Ours is a one-man ranch, and the cowboys are only here for a round-up. I'll have to help you as I did before. Ease down, like that. Lean hard!"

They managed the slow and painful steps into the house. She assisted him to a couch and made him lie down.

"The first thing to do now is to get off your shoe and let me examine the place."

He rebelled violently.

"I prefer for that to wait until I can get to the post, to see the surgeon there."

Her eyes met his so soberly that he felt a chill of apprehension.

"I can't take you to the post to-night. It's over thirty miles from here—a bad ride at night, over rough roads, and with an injured man. It would be a risk to take you, even if I dared to leave the ranch, and I don't dare. I might come back to find it burned to the ground. All Jim's hard work—" She stopped short. "I can make a splint for your leg. Jim's was broken once, and I looked after him. Once I set a dog's leg."

A dog's leg! One might have choked such a girl with a right good will!

She removed his shoe and sock, and examined the swollen and purpling ankle with deft fingers.

"That's better than I hoped for. The smaller bone of the leg is broken above the ankle, so the big bone will act as a natural splint. I'm going to get a clean shingle and some bandages, and fix it up for to-night. To-morrow I can take you back to the post."

He watched her firm, capable hands as she put on the bandage, as skillfully and as impersonal as—as a veterinarian, he told himself.

"Now I must get you something to eat in a hurry. An omelette and some coffee?"

It was quickly made and brought to him

where he lay. The chill of lying so long on the ground had permeated to the bone and marrow. The hot, strong coffee gave him a new grip on himself.

"I—I have not thanked you," he began. The sudden consciousness of how he had failed in appreciation made him stiff and awkward. "I must have seemed horribly ungrateful!"

The girl considered it, her eyes fixed straight on his. They were as clear as brown topazes. Her brother always said that they were the color of a mountain lion's.

"Ungrateful? *Grouchy*, I'd say," she made frank rejoinder. "I suppose an Eastern man would naturally feel that way about an accident."

He could not repress the rejoinder:

"I suppose a Westerner would feel quite merry over a trifle like a broken leg!"

"He might feel glad it wasn't his neck," the girl returned easily. "One runs across a lot of accidents out here, and gets used to them."

"I have heard rumors of an occasional automobile accident east of the Mississippi," he said.

Her face lighted delightfully with her rather rare smile.

"Aren't Easterners funny? You won't even admit there could be more accidents out here! After all, I imagine there's very little difference between one part of the country and another," she said thoughtfully. "People are just folks wherever they chance to live, and so about the same things must happen to them."

It was his turn to smile.

"What a typical New England night we're having!"

She picked up a soft blanket and threw it over him.

"Will you try to go to sleep, since you feel so much at home?"

"At eight o'clock?" he fumed.

She made a sudden restless movement. To any one who knew her, it would have showed the nervous tension she was under, for she was accustomed to hold herself in steady control.

"You need sleep," she soothed, as if to an unreasonable child. "But talk, if you prefer."

So he asked the question uppermost in his mind:

"Is it possible that you are accustomed to stay alone at this isolated ranch?"

"No, of course not. I live here with my brother Jim. He married a year ago. Celia was a great friend of mine at school, and came out here to visit me. I went East to school—to Austin."

East to Texas!

"When I came in to-night, I found a note saying that Celia had been taken ill suddenly, and Jim was afraid it might be appendicitis, so he had hurried her off in the car to the hospital at Bisbee. Jim naturally thought I'd be quite safe here to-night, as nobody would know I was here alone. I'll sit here by the fire awhile. Let me know if you need anything."

Food and warmth had given Barrett a sense of drowsiness which was bliss after the pain and chill.

"You've always lived here? You like this country?"

"Like it! Why, I don't see how people stand living in cities! It would smother me to death. Every time I was on my way back from Austin—"

"The East," he corrected teasingly.

"I'd stay on the rear platform of the observation car all the time, recognizing my friends—mesquite waving to me, yuccas in bloom again, and century plants. Even the old gray sagebrush would seem as friendly as one's grandfather! I'd feel like calling to the tumbleweed, 'You little tramp, where are you blowing to now?' Or saying, 'Hello there, you fat barrel cactus!'"

The cactus was swelling, was growing bigger and bigger, was bursting open, and it was filled with warm air and funny butterflies. Barrett was sound asleep.

III

He was awakened by a touch on his arm. He opened his eyes sleepily, and for a moment could not place himself in the low-raftered room, which somehow had an atmosphere of charm and home. Then he remembered. He was aware of a stabbing pain in his leg, and saw, to his amazement, that the girl was sitting before the fire, with her rifle across her lap. His sleepiness evaporated as if by magic, and he was wide awake.

"Listen!" She spoke in a low, concentrated tone. "I wanted you to get some sleep the first part of the night, so I didn't tell you we were in danger. I hated to arouse you, but I don't dare wait any longer. There's a man, Dick Bent, who owns a small copper mine just on the other side

of the border. He has been going back and forth across the border, smuggling tequila and mescal. He had a false bottom to his wagon, and put the stuff under the false bottom, with a load of ore on top. Nobody bothered to unload all the heavy ore, and he has been getting across with it for a year or more, making money hand over fist. He bought a big car and all that. Maybe the custom officials finally realized that he couldn't be making so much money out of low-grade ore, or maybe somebody informed on him; but anyhow, he was caught red-handed with the goods. He got off with a short sentence and a heavy fine. My brother had nothing to do with it, but Dick Bent believes it was Jim who informed on him. He swore that he'd get even with Jim when he got out of jail, if he had to burn the ranch down, and that he'd pay me back at the same time. He is a university graduate, and they say that he belongs to an old Maryland family, though he doesn't use the name, and that he drifted down to the border and went to the bad, drinking tequila and mescal. You know they say that if a man gets accustomed to tequila, it makes whisky taste like vanilla custard. His term must be out, for he has been here this afternoon; so he must know that Celia and Jim are away. First I saw that track in the road, which I thought was his big car, and then I saw his footprints in the 'dobe mud just this side of the cattle guard. I'd know his footprints anywhere—a narrow boot, no hobnails, and a long stride. He's handsome in an odd way, with his thick black hair and slanting gray eyes, and he's vain of it."

"Surprising in a man like that," suggested Barrett, trying to assume a casualness which he was far from feeling.

She considered it. She had a way of turning over a matter mentally before she expressed her opinion.

"No, I think not. I've known a few 'bad men,' as they are called. All of them were vain in one way or another. All of them boasted about something, whether it was the men they had killed, or the amount of liquor they could drink, or the women who were crazy over them. There was always a brag somewhere."

"And this man's?"

"Women. He thinks they all fall for him. He kept dogging me to marry him until Jim told him not to come around the ranch any more. When he was caught

bootlegging, and thought Jim had informed on him, he swore that he'd burn down this place as soon as he got out of jail, and that—that he'd have me in Mexico, begging him to marry me. He's a dead shot, lots better than I am. I'm pretty fair at game, but I've never shot at a person in my life, and of course it makes a difference. What sort of a shot are you?"

"I have never fired a gun in my life," returned the city man apologetically. "In my part of New England, hunting is a rich man's sport."

"Then will you do just exactly as I tell you? I've been doing a lot of thinking while you were asleep."

She propped up the pillows of Barrett's couch.

"Sit up and let me throw the blanket across your injured foot. You see, he must not guess that you are hurt. Take this pistol, and hold it so—see? But don't pull the trigger under any circumstances, unless I tell you. No, don't grip it as if it were trying to wriggle out of your hand. Hold it naturally."

Her face rippled with mirth.

"You don't have to press your lips tight together to hold a pistol. You look so—so *determined!*"

"That's an improvement over being grouchy," he reminded her.

She moved her footstool close to the couch and sat down, leaning slightly against his knee, but with her rifle across her lap.

"Now we're ready for him, though he's not likely to come until it's late enough for him not to meet anybody on the road out here. Don't you do anything or say anything. If you talk, you'll give him an opening. It's silent folks he doesn't understand. I'm going to pretend that you are my husband, that I married you in Austin, and that you've just turned up again. Then there will be two influences at work on him, unless he has been drinking too hard—he's a Catholic, and still has a sort of respect for marriage buried deep in him; and he's vain, and wouldn't want you to know that he wanted me himself."

"And if he has been drinking hard?" asked Barrett quietly.

He saw her control a shiver.

"Then I may have to shoot, but not until I've tried everything else. If there's shooting, he will get one of us, probably both. If he thought you were—were with me, and *not* my husband, he'd get you. I

wish I had left you in the cañon, where you would have been out of danger!"

"I am glad you didn't," he said with decision. "Don't be unhappy. Maybe he won't come."

She waited a long moment.

"He's outside," she whispered, her trained ear hearing stealthy sounds which Barrett could not detect.

She raised her voice a little. It sounded clear, contented, domestic.

"But Pete, turkeys do wonderfully well in Arizona," she said. "Why, they feed themselves on the grasshoppers, and even if coyotes got a few, it certainly would pay us to keep a—"

The door swung open.

A man stood there—rather a dandy, with his knotted handkerchief around his sunburnt throat, his polished black cowboy boots with the scalloped tops, his long silver spurs, his ivory and silver forty-five glistening in its holster. When he saw Barrett, for a moment his glance swerved in sheer astonishment, and his hand rested lightly on his hip.

"So there is a man to whom you aren't so damned particular?"

She did not lift her rifle. She looked fearlessly into Dick Bent's eyes.

"Meet my husband, Dick! You want to see Jim? He and Celia have gone to Bisbee. She's sick."

Her tone was neither conciliatory nor defiant—merely matter-of-fact.

"Husband!"

Dick Bent's sneer was contemptuous and threatening.

"I married him when I was in Austin, but I never did tell Jim. We didn't get on well together—he was so grouchy; but now he's come back, and I thought maybe we could make a start with turkeys. Know anybody who has some to sell?"

Dick was not drinking. To the contrary, he was cold sober. He had planned a long drive into Mexico, and he wanted to keep his head clear, for he had not meant to go alone. Somehow it didn't seem plausible to abduct a girl who was simply wishing to buy some turkeys, nor to shoot at the gaping dumb-bell she had married.

He looked Barrett over insolently with his slanting eyes.

"If I ever saw a buzzard with a white liver, it's the choice object you're tied up with! Sell him turkeys? Why, a young turkey would freeze to death looking at that

frozen face! You don't seem to trust each other a damned sight, each of you swinging to his gun. Put 'em up!" he commanded harshly.

Barrett, struggling to maintain his self-control, pulled the trigger of his pistol unaware. It seemed to him that it went off with a deafening noise. For a moment he felt that he must have killed both girl and intruder with one fell shot. From an immeasurable distance he heard her chiding:

"Pete, don't you do that again! He was just trying to show off to you, Dick, that he could pick the flower out of that china vase on the mantel."

No less surprising to the girl than the report of the pistol had been to the man was the sound of a burst of laughter.

"Showing off his gunfire to me! Shot the hell out of a vase, did he? Why, that bimbo couldn't hit a bull with a bass fiddle! When his pistol went off, and he nearly jumped out of his skin, and flung his arm straight up in the air, I suppose he was aiming at a fly on the ceiling! Maybe he was shooting a feather from an angel's wing! And to think of you falling for a gun-shy deaf mute!"

The girl seized the advantage of his mood of laughter, sardonic though it was.

"Dick, you thought Jim peached on you. On my word of honor he didn't. Jim's no sneak." She played her last card. "Besides, it would have been low in Jim to tell on you when you wanted to marry his sister."

"I wanted to marry you!" he cried, outraged, stung. "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last skirt in the world! The sort of man you want is this hencoop helper that you picked up riding the zebra in a merry-go-round!"

As he turned to Barrett, the veneer of the later years seemed to drop from him. For a moment there flashed a glimpse of the proud arrogance of his youth.

"My congratulations, Grouch! You'll find this fair *señorita* as sexless as a sycamore sapling! When I choose a woman, she won't spend the first evening she has

been with me in a year discussing the economics of poultry raising!"

Still resting his hand lightly on his hip, he backed out of the door into the night. Presently they heard the purr of his car, headed toward Mexico.

IV

THE girl's whole body was shaken by a violent fit of trembling.

"Thank God I didn't have to shoot! I'd rather die than kill anybody; and if he had shot you, I should have felt like a murderer."

Involuntarily, because it seemed the most natural thing in the entire universe, Barrett put his arm around her quivering body.

"You've been through everything, dear! You're the most wonderful girl I ever saw in my life—the bravest, the best sport. You could teach a man to love this country, to find his place in it, to do a man's work here. You are so fine and so true—"

"True?" she cried. "True, when I lied like that? And I've always prided myself on telling the straight truth."

"Please God, part of what you said was a prophecy, not a lie. You must go to sleep now. It's striking midnight, and—"

To his extreme annoyance, his speech was cut short by a sneeze.

She spoke without considering it.

"I wonder which day it is when the clock is striking midnight! You know the old saying:

"Sneeze on Monday, sneeze for danger;
Sneeze on Tuesday, kiss a stranger."

"You've already had the danger—"

She broke off, and a warm flush stole under her tan. He bent over her, and somewhere against the brown bobbed hair there passed the breath of a kiss.

"But you're not a stranger!" His voice was ringing, triumphant. "I'll know you better than I know any girl in the world—as soon as you tell me your name!"

His own name seemed to be immaterial, for the girl he married six months later always called him "Pete."

HEART'S DESIRE

At dawn, or with the burnished sun at noon,
Some grasp the guerdon whereto they aspire;
But give me twilight and the round, low moon
And love—and lo, I have my heart's desire!

Clinton Scollard

The Synagogue

A STORY OF TWO GENERATIONS OF AMERICAN JUDAISM

By Myron Brinig

IN one week, the town of Silver Bow was born. A young prospector, driving a pack mule across the mountain wilds of Montana, came in sight of a deep gulch that almost split the backbone of the country in twain. The brilliant sun gave the earth a glittering scrutiny, as if conscious of the fact that untold wealth lay hidden away within the locked chest of the land. This prospector had experienced his share of hard times. His worldly goods had all been spent, and he had buried an only child in the violently beautiful place that was later to become the Yellowstone.

"We'll start all over again here," he grimly told his sad-eyed wife.

In a day he had staked his claim. Within the week, wild tales circulated concerning the discovery of silver and copper deposits in a heretofore unheard of place, some four hundred miles north of the Mormon settlement. Silver Bow stretched out its shimmering arms in birth. It was a boom town.

The new magnet drew all classes irresistibly. It drew Moses Mendel, rabbi, and his young wife, Rebecca, from congested Grand Street, in Manhattan. They rode for a whole week across the prairies in the new and proud Northern Pacific trains, and were welcomed with thanksgiving by the Jews of Silver Bow.

"Welcome, chazan, rabbi!" they greeted him.

To a man, they set about building a synagogue on East Silver Street. There, in a wilderness of slag heaps and patches of green copper water, they raised a house of worship to Jehovah, and the holy Torah, bearing the sacred words, was set in its place above the altar.

There were only fifteen Jews in Silver Bow at this time, and one of them was looked on askance, because rumor had connected him with the "restricted district"

on East Galena Street; but the religion of the ages must be carried on, synagogues must be built, children must be taught the law. Therefore even the dubious one was put to work tacking down carpet in the aisle. He wept on the floor and confessed his sins, and the girls he had imported from San Francisco were sent back on the train.

"Ah!" sighed Rebecca Mendel, after she had blessed the lights for the first time since arriving in Montana. "No more happiness for us in this world, Moses! To a wild place you come, where the Indians will maybe murder us in our beds, and where even the Jewish people are like gentiles. *Finster is mir!* Dark is my life!"

But Moses Mendel's enthusiasm was not clouded by hardships and Indians, and he laughed off his wife's fears.

"Look, Becky!" he said, pointing to the synagogue, now almost completed in the very shadow of the Rockies. "Where you seen anything so fine like that? A new synagogue! Like when Moses did hear the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, and came down to his tribes and cried, 'The law! The law!' All my people helped build this *schule*, and I will bring our religion to them, and they will be comforted. It's like I am on fire with it—my religion! It burns me so I want to fall on my knees and cry out, 'I come, O God, I come!' Before there was mountains, before there was yet silver and copper under the ground, there was one God, the true God! See, Becky, *meine liebe*, He brought us here to sing and pray to Him. It was all thought out for us. Now commences a new congregation where the heart is yet clean and strong!"

The synagogue was completed, a tabernacle of stone in a wilderness of gray flats and bronze gulches. The Friday after the last bench had been put in place, the small but intense congregation gathered within, each man with a prayer shawl draped over

his shoulders, and a large golden-brown prayer book in hand.

The prayer shawl, with its horizontal stripes of blue or purple, testifying that "the Lord is one," was as yet unwrinkled. As was the custom, the prayer book was also used as a drum, against which the palm of the hand was slapped, demanding silence.

Fifteen of the faithful prayed so intensely that their bodies moved in a swaying rhythm, forward, then back, and forward again. The rich voices lingered over the Hebrew script as if each accent were an opal reflecting a thousand lights and nuances of feeling. In front of the altar, his frame shapeless under the flowing prayer shawl, a skull cap fixed on his head, Moses chanted deep, haunting melodies that flooded the heart and fired the senses.

The women prayed meekly, as if, through lack of equal strength, they were unable to mount to the peaks of spiritual exaltation attained by the men. The few children looked on at the strange ceremonies with eyes grown great beyond all experience and understanding.

The only light was that thrown by tall white candles, which stood in the dusky corners like emaciated white saints crowned by orange and blue flames. In the reflected glow, the forms of the congregation were dim and ethereal, now plunged into shadowy caves, now upright again, ghosts hastily sprung back from a mysterious crusade into darkness.

In the very beginning, when man first materialized on the earth, the beasts must have stood apart and mocked at the strange creatures, fantastic and unearthly. So when the first synagogue in Silver Bow was filled with voices, the prospectors stood by and grinned wonderingly at this unfamiliar display of worship. It was a long-forgotten voice crying out of a medieval past into a crude and bubbling present, infusing the brazen furnace of a pioneer community with the rich, stained glamour of an old tradition.

There were not a few rude remarks and malicious sallies; but the worshipers chanted on with undiminished ardor. The synagogue was already deep in the lives of its people, a monument unmoving, ever young, and yet as old as the million nights since Abraham.

The synagogue was firmly established, and in conjunction with it Moses had start-

ed his kosher butcher shop. Every Wednesday, when the car of live stock reached Silver Bow, Moses was there, prepared to slaughter cattle in the true way, so that the sacrifice might be acceptable in the eyes of Jehovah.

"Blessed art Thou who sanctified us with Thy commandments, and commanded us concerning slaughtering."

Moses had purchased a horse, which he drove to the stockyard; and after the cattle had been killed, he loaded their carcasses into a wagon and brought them to the shop. It was mercilessly hard work, this part of his duty, and Rebecca had to help dress the beef; but it was the law. Otherwise the orthodox would have been compelled to eat of flesh shot dead by gentiles, and unblest.

There was also the labor of killing chickens on Saturday, after sundown. The law forbade the killing of winged creatures by the ax. Moses clutched the birds by their wings, murmured a prayer, and then, in the manner prescribed, sliced their throats with a blade sharpened to the fineness of a thread. The shop was filled with flutterings and drifts of softness, and feathers covered everything in it, like tools in a farmyard buried under drifts of December snow.

No work was done from Friday to Saturday sundown. It was *shabbas*, the day of rest. When it was winter, and the frost made the door knobs burn to the touch, Rebecca and Moses did not even light the fires in the stoves over the holy day, but called in neighboring gentile boys to apply their matches to the paper.

With the coming of night on Saturday, the rush and furor commenced again. The shop was clogged by children grasping restless chickens in their arms. Behind the counter, Rebecca was kept busy sawing and slicing desirable portions of beef for the discriminating shoppers. It was a vivid, exciting life that Moses and Rebecca brought with them to Montana—a life of golden prayer in the synagogue, and a perpetual routine of butchering in the shop.

For many weeks past Rebecca had been heavy with child. One Saturday, after the last shopper had departed, laden with purchases and talked out of gossip, Moses saw his wife faint away over the counter. He was alarmed, and carried her into the back room.

"Becky, my sweet wife!" he cried, in tears. "What has happened that you do

not speak to me? What is it, my loved one? Oh, that I should make you to work so hard! God will never forgive me! He is a great and stern God, and He will punish me!"

The doctor was immediately sent for, and early on Sunday morning Sollie was born. He was one of the first of his race to salute with lusty wails the gigantic Montana scene, the sharp, blue skies and the rugged mountains. He was named after Solomon of old, the illustrious one, the wise one—how wise!

Chariots with wheels of solid gold, rare silks and burning jewels, surrounded Solomon in the days of his pinnacled glory. Sollie's blanket was thin and cheap, and his little dress was of coarse cotton. Temples with aspiring domes, and palaces whose long aisles hung in a mist of sweet, sensuous perfumes, were Solomon's glory throughout the crimson and gold days of his reign; but Sollie came to Silver Bow when streets were rutted trails, and prospectors still slumbered under the open sky.

How fine it is to have a son!

"He should be like Abraham Lincoln," crooned Rebecca over her baby.

"I will make a rabbi of him," said Moses.

Sollie was restless, and climbed eagerly over his mother's breast; but his cruelty of movement filled her with satisfaction and thrilling content. The Queen of Sheba had her Solomon, great and wise; and Rebecca Mendel had her Sollie, so small, yet so beloved! He kicked his sturdy legs against his mother's breast, and they hurt her, but Rebecca throbbed with the blissful pain.

When it came time for the function of making a Jew out of Sollie through the ancient custom of circumcision, Moses could hardly bear to cause his son any hurt. He was almost sorry that Sollie was not a girl, for the operation was a painful one.

In the room adjoining, Rebecca, propped up against pillows, cried when she heard the child wailing out its distress. So often had Rebecca heard that wail without flinching! Then it had been the law; but now it was her baby, part of herself, meeting his first knife at the hands of the world.

The ceremony was lived through somehow, and after an hour, when Sollie was sleeping peacefully, Moses entertained his friends with cakes and wine. There was laughter, and great merrymaking, and in Rebecca's room were many fine presents.

"*Mozeltoj!*" every one said, to wish the child a long life.

Two years later there was a girl, and they called her Ruth—"friend."

"*Nu!*" Rebecca said to her well wishers. "A boy is a comfort in the house, but Ruth, she rests easy on my heart."

"I will bring them up in the synagogue," said Moses, "and they will carry on the ancient law."

II

SILVER BOW was a town of deep cavities, into which were lowered men who dug, with the sweat of their bodies, for copper, and still more copper. A Main Street had cleared the way from Big Butte Hill to the very base of the Rockies. Here the wares of merchants seduced the eyes of the miners, and saloons made merry hells out of the tingling, altitudinous nights.

The pioneers were vanishing. In their youth, a traveling tent show, with a famous Polish actress as star, had drawn from them a blizzard of gold pieces and wild hurrahs. *Madame* had been raised off the stage, and had fainted divinely from the excitement; but that was long ago. Now the grandsons of the pioneers twisted and wriggled to the jazz melodies of eccentric bands.

The richest copper hill in the world changed subtly. Old shafts were abandoned, and new gallows frames lifted their glinting towers into the sky. On the South Side a great smelter had made its appearance, and all night the stars drifted wanly through heavens dyed a rubescent red. They were passing, the pioneers; many had moved to California, where the climate was "better for the lungs."

Moses was white now, and his beard covered his breast like a cloak of ermine. He looked a symbol of his race as he moved about his unrelenting duties, quivering in his step, but still consumed with the blaze that shone fiercely from his eyes.

Rebecca's hands had grown huge and red from much sawing and cutting of meat. In the old days these same hands had been white butterflies hovering over and blessing the orange and blue candle flames.

Their children were grown. Sollie was a nervous, high-strung young man with a keen eye for "opportunities." Moses had long since buried any hopes of making his son a rabbi. The girl, Ruth, moved in the socially elect West Side set, and was seen about with gentiles. Her hair was black as

jet, and her eyes moved young men into strange, troubled dreams.

The camp had become a town. Office buildings were beginning to look out of golden glass eyes straight to the tops of the Rockies. The roughness of the early days was greatly diluted. There was at work a systematic routine piling up wealth into millions. Rotary clubs flourished, and real estate men advertised new additions close by the car lines, with all the modern improvements.

In the synagogue, however, ceaselessly swaying figures prayed on, and continued to slap their palms against glazed prayer books. The shophar, or ram's horn, was still blown on the Day of Atonement, recalling men from the eternal, grinding wheel of toil to an exaltation of the spirit.

Sollie did not hear the shophar.

"Papa, I got a good chance to go into business. If I put two thousand dollars into this deal, I'm on the way to being a rich man!"

"Money! Money!" cried Moses, putting aside the Jewish newspaper that he received daily from New York. "All my life I wanted you to be a rabbi, to step into my place when they bury me. When you was a boy, didn't I make you to read Hebrew? And when you was run away from Sabbath school, I gave it to you such lickings! And all for what? That you should come to me with talk on business, and no thoughts from higher things? All my life I say, 'Sollie, study hard, and maybe some day you will be a *ruf*, a learned man, so that your race will look up to you!' And now you talk from nothing but business, business! *Oi, geweh!*"

"And Ruth, she ain't no better, neither," interposed the mother, pausing in her efforts to thread a needle.

It seemed as if Rebecca's hands were never still. When it wasn't housework, it was butchering; and in between whiles, it was sewing ceaselessly, inserting and drawing a needle through stuffs and stuffs and stuffs. Poor old fingers, so mutilated now, so scarred!

"Do you think maybe Ruth would spend a minute in the house, helping her mamma? It's always shows and dances and new fellers. Papa, the new generation is different from what we used to was. Pretty soon there won't be Jews, and nobody will build synagogues. All peoples will be the same!"

His mother's views did not seem to dis-

turb Sollie. His thoughts were far removed from speculation about religion. All his movements were quick, spasmodic, and in his eyes schemes unfolded themselves and glittered narrowly.

"Mamma, you don't understand," he interrupted with a *moue* of impatience. "The world's changing nowadays. It used to be, when you and papa was young, that religion was the whole show. You breathed it and ate it three times a day; but now, if you don't go out and rake in the dough, you're finished, and finished quick! It's financial position that makes the man of to-day. That's why I want to get in on the ground floor. I got a chance to clean up a fortune, if papa will only lend me a couple of thousand dollars."

Rebecca's thoughts were elsewhere.

"So many nice Jewish boys what they are in Silver Bow, and Ruthie goes out with gentiles! *Nu*, if only my father was living yet, he would show her what's right with a strap!" She nodded her head sadly. "A fine thing it is for a rabbi when his daughter goes out to gentile dances, and his son bets money on the race track. Don't think we sleep, Sollie!"

"*Shah*, woman!" interrupted Moses irritably. "Be still! To go out with a gentile don't mean that she will marry him. What business you want to go in, Sollie? I shouldn't throw my money away."

"Papa, it's the only business in a growing town like this—real estate. Tex Vincent, the sporting man, he bought up a lot of land when you could get it for a song—what you should have done, papa, instead of praying so much. Now Tex wants me in the business. He says I'm a hustler!" Sollie beamed proudly. "It's a sure thing, papa. Why shouldn't I get in on the ground floor?"

"But, Sollie," pleaded Moses, "what good does all the money do you when there ain't no heart for religion? Old Goldstein was telling me just the other day as how he never sees you any more in the synagogue. Is that right for the son of a rabbi? Ruthie goes out with gentile fellers, and instead from introducing her to some nice Jewish boy, you tell her to go ahead with a *goy*. Is that a good brother? A man should set a good example to his race—go to *schule*, and pray to God. He should close up his business on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana, and not always think from his pocket-book and good times in road houses!"

"Papa is right," said Rebecca. "It's the heart what counts. If you got no place from religion in your heart, then all the money in the world won't make it a place for you in heaven."

"Aw, mamma! Honest, you two make me tired!" Sollie looked disgusted. "What difference does it make where you go when you die? It's life what counts. Afterward, you're a long time dead!"

"No! No!" cried Moses. "Some day, when you are older, you will know better, Sollie. Maybe you will be rich and have nice gentile friends; but you will never know the thoughts I have had in my head. You will never know what means it to come to a wilderness where there is only fifteen yet from your own peoples, to build a synagogue and bring back a religion. That was happiness, Sollie—to build a *schule* with mine own hands, and to pray for mine peoples. That was living! You won't never know, my son, what it means to sing 'Kol Nidre' with your heart and soul crying! It's stone you got for a heart; but you don't count. No! No! The Torah lives forever; the synagogue never dies. Ruthie can go out with gentiles, and you can eat bread on Passover—don't think I'm blind, Sollie—but the synagogue it lives!"

"Papa, you shouldn't make yourself sick from talking so much," advised Rebecca. "Give him the money what he wants, and let him go his own way. *Goy* what he is! He should have seen the pogroms in Kishineff, and he would know what it means to be religious. Didn't I tell you, when still he was a boy, that he would grow up different from us old peoples? Didn't I see him playing pool on *shabbas*? Never will I forget the time I seen him riding to the top from a building on a piece of iron. Anything he would do for money, except maybe go to *schule*!"

"Then you'll give me the money, papa? You'll stake me to two thousand?" Sollie broke in, impatient of further argument.

Moses shrugged his shoulders dismally.

"Yes—why not?" he whispered, deeply depressed.

III

THE rousing noise of a motor car was heard from the street. Two people were whispering together on the porch—a man and woman. Abruptly the door swung open, and Ruth stood on the threshold. She looked flushed to the point of fever,

and her fingers twisted nervously and moved into tense patterns.

"Ruthie! Guess what!"

In his enthusiasm, Sollie sprang forward and kissed his sister—not a usual occurrence with the undemonstrative young man. Ruth looked at him uncomprehendingly. It was obvious that all her thoughts were elsewhere. For a minute, she could only tremble under the stress of some insistent emotion.

"Papa's going to lend me that two thousand!" Sollie shouted at her. "Boy, won't Tex be glad?"

"Oh!" said Ruth wearily, and moved away from them toward her own bedroom.

"Where you was, Ruthie?" Moses asked her suddenly, and she stopped dead in her movements. "Is this an hour for a girl to come home?"

"Oh, papa! Don't bother me—please. I—I'm tired."

She made a step forward.

"Where you was, Ruthie?"

A tightness of steel bound that voice. She knew her father.

"Can't you see I'm all in, papa?" She turned on him with a sort of weak desperation. Then, abruptly, she drew back and flaunted a strength and independence that had come to her in an unexpected moment. "Well, why shouldn't you know now as well as any other time? I've just been married to Tex Vincent. He didn't come in with me, because we thought you might object; but I love him, papa—I love him!"

She started to sob without hiding her face.

It seemed as if years rose in thousands and were engulfed with each tick of the clock, until eternity had moved with the minute hand. Moses stirred at last from his place close to the table, and raised himself on one elbow. He smiled in a grotesque way.

"Ah, Ruthie! Why you joke, eh?"

But the mother comprehended at once.

"A *goy* she married! And she the daughter from a rabbi!"

Rebecca forgot her sewing, and it slipped from her knees to the floor in a curiously inanimate way. The needle that had moved so incessantly looked frozen into a silver stillness.

"Better we was all dead!" she cried.

"You're joking, Ruthie, no?" faltered Moses.

He was incredibly aged now, and his

beard gave him the remote appearance of a patriarch. The fire in his eyes was caught in a trance.

"Oh, no, we're married." Ruth's voice had become monotonous. "What of it? He's a human being, the same as you or anybody else. I'm very tired, papa, and I've got a lot of packing to do. Tex is taking me out to his mine at Boulder."

Moses had stood in the very heart's swirl of a Montana blizzard, and had been lifted and spun in its center. Just so was he caught up now and tossed about with no firm ground under his feet.

"Married—to a *goy*!"

He rose from his chair, wavered for a moment, and then stumbled to the floor, where he sat in a vacant stupor, like some vanquished idol. Ruth hurried to his side, and attempted to lift him gently.

"Papa! Please—you'll catch cold—oh, papa!"

"Away!" he cried. "*Shiksa!* Christian girl! A fire on your head! Go! I do not want to look on you, Ruthie. Do you hear? I do not want you! Just like yesterday you was a baby. I wanted another boy, but when I seen how pretty—you stand there like stone? Away! Any good Jewish boy you might have got, and now—how they will laugh on me! 'Take after the rabbi's children,' everybody said. 'Model yourself on the rabbi's children.' And now she marries a Christian, with not even a rabbi for the ceremony! And her children, they won't know what it is to belong to a synagogue!"

"I don't understand," said Ruth in a low voice. "All people are the same in this town. One's as good as another. Why should I marry the one you pick out for me, when my heart cries for some one else? I—I don't understand!"

"*Jessica! Jessica!*" *Shylock* had cried, reeling through the impassive streets of Venice. "Ruthie! Ruthie!" cried Moses, beating his breast with his fists; and all yesterdays were as to-day.

Ruth turned away from the pitiable sight, as if realizing how futile any more words would be. As she turned the knob of the door that led into her room, Sollie caught up with her.

"Good luck, sis!" he whispered. "Tex is a wonderful guy, and I'm glad you married him. Ain't you going to kiss your brother? Don't mind dad! He'll get over it."

"Better we never came out West! Bet-

ter we stayed in Russia and lived under the Czar!" wept Rebecca, helping her husband to his feet.

Moses turned toward the window, and lifted the curtains. He strained his eyes peering through the glass.

"What, am I blind?" he chided himself in a mournful voice. "The synagogue, I do not see it, Rebecca. *Ich kann nicht sehen*. So many troubles! Who can tell? Maybe the great God has sent all this to punish me. Look, Rebecca! Maybe your eyes are yet better as mine."

Rebecca looked at this man with whom she had lived for so many years with a new and anxious bewilderment.

"Yes, it is there, papa. See? Like it was there since the world began."

After a moment, the old rabbi's eyes cleared, and he saw the synagogue, carved of the earth's elements, and immortal as thought. Stanch, true, the synagogue was there.

"I know how he feels, poor papa," wept Ruth, as Sollie helped to pack her belongings into the trunk; "but heavens, you only live once!"

"You said it sis," affirmed Sollie.

IV

SOLLIE did get in on the "ground floor"; and when the twelve-story Mendel Block rose on the corner of Park and Main Streets, he rose to financial eminence with it. Picture post cards circulated throughout the State with the legend:

Tallest Building in Montana

The name of Mendel took on a new meaning. No longer was it "Mendel, the old rabbi." People would say:

"Mendel—oh, he's a hustler! He certainly deserves all the money he's made. Did you ever see him work? Lord, like a machine! Always on the spot. I've seen him ride to the top of one of his buildings on a steel girder. Imagine! He says it gives him a sense of power. Some pep, that boy!"

Sollie no longer lived with his parents on East Silver Street. He had bachelor quarters in the new California Apartments, on West Broadway. The apartment house was still a novel thing for Silver Bow—an audacious, exhilarating experience. It gave the former camp an air of metropolitanism, and drew rents that had been undreamed of in the days when Marcus Daly and W.

A. Clark were fighting each other for supremacy. Sollie Mendel had risen, literally, on a steel girder to the lofty peaks of prosperity—a modern Solomon, with his hundreds of employees and his temples of commerce. The Solomons are wise—how wise!

Tearing down the old and building up the new—that was Sollie Mendel's greatest passion. The mechanical mastication of rock and soil between the enormous teeth of steam shovels, the rat-a-tat-tat of riveters—these were the songs most dear to Sollie's ears. The shophar of the synagogue did not reach him now. The call of the ram's horn could not penetrate the ribs of steel and stone that inclosed Sollie's dizzy world.

When Passover came, he was unaware that his parents were eating matzoth as he chewed a hasty ham sandwich between conferences. On the Day of Atonement he was drawing up plans for his new vaudeville theater and cabaret combined—the Orpheum Circuit in Silver Bow! The highest-paid Broadway stars! The best jazz band west of the Mississippi! Great is Solomon! Wise is he!

"Papa, I hear that a new building goes up soon next door the synagogue," said Rebecca. "Mr. Goldstein he says as how this part from town will be all teayters in a few years. *Nu!* Things don't stand still in America!"

"What you say?" answered Moses in dreadful surprise. "A building from next the synagogue? But it can't be. Ain't it Sollie what owns this ground?"

"Well, Sollie says as how he's willing to move the synagogue to another part from town. He thinks maybe it will hurt his show business."

"You talk *mit* Sollie?" Moses turned on his wife with anger blazing from his eyes. "After I did tell you he is no more a son from us?"

"But, papa," explained Rebecca, "can I pass him by when he meets me on the street? How can you know the way a mother feels for her son, bad as he is?"

But there were more pressing problems in the rabbi's mind.

"He wants to build next door the synagogue a teayter, a dance hall? But he can't do such a thing, Rebecca. *Gott!* Better he should never to be born. The synagogue I help to build with mine own hands! Never will he do such a thing!"

"He says as how it will help to make the town much more business," Rebecca went on. "He will make a big cabaret, like the one on Park Street—the Dreamland, where they dance this ragtime. I think, papa, it would be better if we let him move the synagogue to the other side from town, where everything is quiet."

"I move nothing!" stormed Moses. "Nothing! My son, he is not such a devil that he will not listen to me. I will go to him. Yes, mamma, get me my hat and coat. For the sake from my religion I will go and talk with that man who is no more my son. My daughter she marries a gentile, and now my son wants to build a dance hall over my heart, where all the scum from the town will dance and make fun. *Pfah!* Mine coat! I will go to him like I am only a Jew, and not his father."

"Papa, *mach nicht ein geschrei!* Do not get excitable with him! What will all the peoples think over such a thing, fighting with one from your own children? Better you stay home and wait a week, and then maybe I will see Solly my own self and talk nice—"

"*Shah!* Where is your mind that you talk like this? You are a woman. The kitchen is your place. Do you think I am without a heart and soul, that I will see them break the synagogue for a dance hall? I will go and speak with that man who long ago was my son!"

V

THE elevator boy at the California Apartments was insolently certain that Mr. Mendel was not at home; but Moses brushed past the loyal servant imperiously, and, without knocking, opened the door that led into his son's agreeably decorated rooms.

Sollie, in his shirt sleeves, sat at a desk that was heaped high with plans and blue prints. Despite his pallor, his haggard, drawn look, there was about him a refulgence of feverish activity, an electrical restlessness that clung to his personality under all circumstances. His eyes flashed as they examined the mass of papers so intricately diagramed and meticulously drawn to scale. This was Sollie's life—his whole life!

He looked up with annoyance as the door opened, but at sight of his father his reaction was one of pleasurable pride.

"Papa! Well, well! This is a surprise! Take a chair, papa! My, you look old

now, you know! Here, papa, this is a nice, soft chair for you."

But Moses refused to be beguiled from his mission by any trivial conventionalities. He planted himself in front of the door, and the expression of his face was stubborn and dark. He addressed his son in Yiddish.

"They did tell me as how you will build a teayter and dance hall next door the *schule*."

"Yeh! Ain't that great? And just think, papa, we're getting the Orpheum Circuit into this town. It's the best vaudeville in the country. On the roof, I'm going to have a cabaret with a real jazz band. I tell you, Silver Street is the coming White Way! I was just telling—"

"You must not build in such a place, where the ground is sacred," interrupted Moses, and his voice was as stone. "You must not build. It is I who say it, chazan from the synagogue!"

Sollie forgot his plans for the time being, and scratched the top of his head in quizzical fashion.

"I don't get you, papa. What are you talking about?"

"It is plain talk," resumed Moses. "I say you must not build a house of pleasure in such a place. Before you was yet born, the synagogue was there, and it must not be changed. This is plain talk."

Sollie rustled the papers on his desk with an irritable nervousness.

"The plans are drawn," he said coldly. "It is too late. Besides, I will give the synagogue a fine location on the South Side. *Zehst*, papa? I'll build a beautiful church for you. I got an architect coming out from New York who's going to set the town on fire with his ideas. He can build churches with his eyes closed. What's more, I'll agree to stand part of the cost. What more do you want?"

"Your money I don't want. You get it from bad women and race tracks. Synagogues are not built from such a kind of money. Forty years have I lived in one place. Forty years now the synagogue stands in peace. God's house don't want money—it wants prayer. Five years you put not a foot inside the *schule*. On Pass-over you eat bread in the tref restaurants. On Yom Kippur you eat when I fast, when I am weak before Jehovah. A whole year you do your business and you sin with women, and with the New Year you do not come to the synagogue and ask forgive-

ness for your sins. *Finsten is mir!* Dark is my life! I prayed God for a son who would be as a staff in my old years. I was too proud, too confident. But I will not speak like a father. I speak as a Jew. I say you must not build a dance hall in such a place that will shame Israel. It is plain talk!"

"Oh, papa, for the Lord's sake—"

"I have spoken!"

"Papa, I'll do anything you say but that. Now look here, papa. Sit down. You seem like a stranger to me. You think everything is in my hands, don't you? Wait a minute. Business to-day ain't that simple. If I was the whole shooting match in every deal I put over, I could fix things to suit your ideas; but there's creditors, there's the bank, there's the vaudeville people, there's contracts, there's a pay roll."

Sollie droned on and on, trying to put in a kindly way items that filled his waking hours until they were inevitable incidents in his life.

"Now take the bank, for instance. Do you know—"

"I have spoken!" cried Moses.

There was blood in his voice, there were unutterable agonies and age-long tears in his voice.

"*Jessica! Jessica!*" *Skylock* had implored, wringing his hands and beating his breast, while the amused spectators of his grief spat upon his gaberdine.

"I have spoken!" cried Moses, breaking down at last and becoming, inevitably, a father pleading with his son. This modern day was too much for him. He was crying before a son who did not deserve a father's tears. "Sollie! I ask you, Sollie, if—"

The aged man clutched at the desk for support.

"Papa, here—take this chair. Wait—I'll get you a glass of wine. Wait a minute! Gee, you mustn't excite yourself like that! What's the use? The world ain't worth it, I say. That's my opinion. The world—"

"No!" Moses held out his hand to refuse the proffered refreshment, so that the glass slipped from Sollie's hand, and the wine poured out like a stream of blood on the floor. "I will go home."

"Papa, wait! Let me call you a taxi. Wait—"

Moses turned defiantly on his son.

"You think I am already dead, hoh? You think I cannot walk, hoh?"

Sollie started to expostulate, but after a minute he found himself talking to blank walls. Moses was out of the room, and the spilled wine, winking in golden puddles under the light of the chandelier, was the only reminder of the rabbi's presence in that house.

"Well, papa, you seen him, eh?" asked Rebecca, as Moses slowly closed the door after him. From her husband's expression, Rebecca knew well enough what the result of the meeting had been. "You talked *mit* him, eh?"

"The evil one, I seen him!" answered Moses sadly. "Look, it is already the Sabbath, and my heart is full of evil things. Bring me my prayer shawl, Rebecca. I will go to *schule* and pray. To think that after forty years I should forget it was *shabbas*! *Nu*, we are not young forever."

Before the altar he knelt long, praying in his golden tenor voice for those of his race, all over the world, who have departed from the path of virtue and the ways of the ancestors. Some thought him unconscious there under the holy Torah. His body was pressed down by a heavy grief that left his muscles numb. It was ever a house of lamentation, the synagogue, ever a place of tears and sobs. Those tall white candles with their shooting ribbons of flame were ever impassive spectators of scenes of grief.

Moses lay huddled and broken there at the foot of the altar. The congregation was small. From Sabbath to Sabbath it grew smaller these days. Many of those who had helped to build this house of worship now lay in the small cemetery at the edge of the flats, where the restlessly moving shadows of the Rockies soothed their long sleep with a soundless lullaby of light and shade. They had striven courageously; and now the drifting shadows were their flags at half mast.

The children of those pioneers were too busy to come to Friday service. It was enough, they said, that they attended on the big holidays of the year. Did they not close their places of business on Yom Kippur, thereby incurring heavy losses in these hard times? And anyway, what does it get you? In the end, you're a long time dead!

The rabbi knelt there long. To the north, on the richest copper hill in the world, cages slid up and down the bottomless shafts, carrying loads of men into the deep womb of the earth. Thousands of feet down, grimy miners bled the rich veins of

copper—an unending stream of burnished blood, blood of the earth, blood of the rock. The mines sang out a continuous medley of toil; and the smelters, like seething volcanoes, scorched the sky with pennants of hilarious fire.

Moses prayed.

VI

WITHIN the month, the steel skeleton of Sollie's new wonder building was reaching up into the blue, and waiting for the bone of cement and the flesh of brick to cover its grim nudity. All day the clang of signal bells and the shouts of workmen corroded the hours into a mechanical conspiracy.

There was something about the construction of a great building that filled Sollie Mendel's soul with unspeakable delight, and lifted him into the rarest atmosphere of his existence. He possessed no deep powers of human love. It could not be said of him that he loved a single human being with fervor, though many were known to bask in the thin sunlight of his commendation. His creed, evasive as a butterfly, had little to do with human relationships.

Nevertheless, Sollie was capable of vivid emotional feeling. There were a few sensations that roused him to a fine exaltation—sensations concerned with tearing down the old and building up the new. It was sordid to destroy old beauties, as Sollie destroyed them; but it was idealistic to create new beauties, as Sollie created them. He was not a symbol of American enterprise. He *was* that enterprise in human force, with all its multitudinous defects and virtues. His work, complete within itself, and disdainful of outside impressions, was his whole life, his religion, and his immortality.

"My work! My endeavor! My masterpiece!" his heart cried out, when he beheld his buildings in the sky.

It soared out of his breast and lifted with the steel girders as they rose hundreds of feet into the air, to be riveted into position. Sollie did not know of Shakespeare and Keats; but if it were possible to translate them into terms of steel and brick, he would have understood.

The synagogue looked small beside the rising structure that was one day to be "the livest cabaret in the whole Northwest." Within the church, the few faithful were not daunted by the rat-a-tat-tat of the riveters, and the unceasing hammering of

steel on steel. The barbaric shriek of the twelve-o'clock whistle could not altogether obliterate the call of the shophar, the sacred horn blown to recall men to worshipful ways.

The tall steel structure flaunted its fine, gleaming beauty, like a picked officer of the guard conscious of his brave uniform; but the synagogue was life itself, stripped of all outward show and pride, feeling its roots in the uncountable ages, lifting its aspirations beyond the star-flecked floor of the sky.

The new building climbed five, six, seven stories—a skyscraper for Silver Bow—and Sollie's enthusiasm climbed with it.

"I'll ride up with you!" he said to one of his workmen, who sat astride one of the girders.

They rose together, and Sollie's thoughts soared as they climbed. He saw the whole vista of Silver Bow beneath him—the mines, the smelters, the buildings, many of them his own, the streets gay threads in a skillfully designed texture, crossing and recrossing. Up, up, up, and he beheld, far to the northwest, the peaks of the Cœur d'Alenes. He felt almost certain that he saw out there, beyond the last shoulder of the mountains, the State of Idaho; and somewhere beyond were Oregon and the great rolling Pacific. The world was not so large, after all. It could be conquered to the last obstacle.

Up, up, up—how fine, how straight and beautiful is a skyscraper! What woman, what beloved friend can compare with it? The steel shines more brightly than any pair of eyes, and the stately architecture makes the human form so small, so weak and ephemeral!

"Poor papa down there!" thought Sollie. "Poor papa, stagnating, keeping to the old ways! If he could only rise and see the world as I see it! Poor papa, praying and whining down there! Why are Jews always whining about this and that and the other—whining about persecution and prejudice? The thing to do is to battle away all walls with your brain! Religion must be construction and change. Religion must be steel on steel, story on story, steep as a cliff, piercing the clouds. Religion is industry, and the management of hundreds of people. This, this is religion!"

Even the mountains, which appeared so mighty from down below, so formidable, looked docile from this great height. The

trees were pins in a brightly colored map; and the Great Divide was only a back drop lowered to entertain Eastern tourists. Everything was puny but this fine human effort, this imposing structure, this strong girder being drawn to the suspended lamp of the sun, exhilarating the blood and inspiring the senses. To forget one's self in one's work—that was the highest pinnacle of life, of ambition!

Down below, Moses prayed.

"God of our fathers, have mercy on Thy people! Show us the right way, O Lord, the one God and the true God! Thou art so great and man is so small! Lead us into humble, worshipful paths, so that we may not forget thy greatness. The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Amen!"

VII

A FEW weeks later they were ready to move the last girder into place. There it lay, the last mighty limb waiting to become a part of the giant, the bone that would give consummate strength and balance to the perfect whole.

No one could know that not so many years past, a lone prospector had found silver and copper just beneath. Then Silver Bow had been a wilderness, hidden away in the hollows of the Rocky Mountains. Now the city was a jewel glittering at the throat of a copper-limbed Apollo, whose feet rested deep in the prismatic treasure holes, and whose head crowded the stars toward the horizon.

"I'll take the ride up," cried Sollie, "just to celebrate! Here, give me room! I want to go up, up, up! I like it, man! It's better than a cocktail to me!"

So he was allowed to take his place on the girder that moved upward in the sunlight, a free and brave spectacle to the eye.

Sollie felt now that the apex of his life had been reached. His career was its own justification. He had planned, toiled, accomplished. He had produced this structure, strong, vivid, resolute.

He rose to his feet on the vessel of steel afloat in the vast ocean of air. He was captain of the world. The clouds were his sails and the sun his compass.

From down below, some one cried up at him to be careful, but Sollie did not hear. How hear the world, so far away? He stood thus, stanch and clean against the sky, a statue on a moving pedestal, and the golden brush of the sun stroked him into

brilliant beauty. For one single moment he was all immortality.

Then, without warning, the girder turned turtle. Sollie lost his footing. Like a bird that has been caught in its flight by a bullet, he fell instantaneously down upon the cement floor, and was still.

He was quickly the center of a mad confusion. They lifted his broken body, and his arms hung as if no longer a part of him. Somewhere a flame of life sputtered in his depth, as if unwilling that those eyes which had beheld such grandeur, such color, should be forever closed.

There was only one place to take Sollie. The synagogue door was open, as always, and it was cool and restful within. There must be something divine where there is rest.

Moses Mendel was caught away from his prayer. Turning, he saw that broken form, those incredibly listless arms, coming nearer. Was Solomon of old broken so at the last?

"Fell down—"

"Girder wobbled—"

"He's alive—"

"Glass of water—"

"Somebody call a doctor—police—"

"Stand away from him, you fools—"

"His own fault—"

"You shut up. What do you know about—"

"Where's a glass of water, for God's sake?"

Moses calmed the confusion with his fine, peaceful hands; and all sound died away as quickly as it had commenced.

"Leave us! He is my son! Peace in this house! Leave us!"

In the rear darkness an old woman was weeping into her apron. She had been at the kitchen fire, presumably, getting something out of the oven, when the news had come, and she had forgotten to remove her apron. No one had ever seen her when she wasn't drudging, scrubbing, cooking, sewing. Her apron was somehow a badge.

Moses lifted his son's head into his lap, and passed a soothing hand over the boy's eyes. He prayed rapidly—something about death:

"Oh, our Father! Receive—into the dust—"

He prayed in Hebrew.

Sollie wished to speak. He mumbled. He smiled with a terrific audacity. His breast rose, and he was bent like steel white-hot out of the furnace.

"Papa, you see—ain't it—a beautiful building—I put up? Papa, I built—I—"

He clung madly to his pride, releasing hold at last with a long sigh.

Moses bent and gathered the dead man, his son, into his arms. He stood erect, holding the body under the holy Torah.

"I offer him to Thee, O Lord! Thou knowest best. Thou art so great, and man—what is man?"

After it had grown quite dark, the steel structure next door looked dumb and cold; but the synagogue was alive with a golden agony of prayer and song. The moon looked on through beams tinged crimson and blue and gold as they streamed through the windows.

There was no ending to the song heard in the synagogue. It was as a tree whose roots are in the million nights since Abraham, and whose branches cannot be seen.

THE WANDERER

THE wind comes walking through my house
On restless feet and light,
When all my casements open wide
To welcome in the night.

I hear it stir a window flap
Or move a rocking-chair,
And wistfully go stepping on
To linger at the stair.

I listen and I sigh, my dear,
Though housed, and happy, too;
For you were ever like the wind—
Is there no rest for you?

Neeta Marquis

The Twisted Foot

A STORY OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE IN THE GREAT WEST

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Rider of Golden Bar," etc.

SAM CALTROP, manager of the Eighty-Eight Ranch, and Rum Gordon, the foreman, order Buff Warren, one of their cowboys, to drive off a family of "nesters," who have defied the cattlemen by settling on the range, and have actually dared to plow up a patch of it. Buff finds that Abijah Fair, head of the offending family, is blind, and the eldest daughter, Gilian, is such a pretty girl that the cowboy loses his heart to her. Moved by sympathy and love, instead of molesting the Fairs, he declares himself on their side, and helps them with their plowing. This act of treason, as it seems to all good cattlemen, necessitates the resignation of his job at the Eighty-Eight.

The next day sees Buff again at the Fairs' place, where he learns that some unknown enemy has just driven off their little bunch of cattle. He follows the raider—who proves to be one Andy Tresawna, a gambler—takes him by surprise, and disarms him. Then he turns back the Fairs' cattle, and starts Tresawna on his way to the neighboring town of Farewell, from which the gambler hails.

X

WHEN they arrived at Packsaddle, the creek was in spate, for there had been rain in the Frying Pans.

"She's running too strong to swim," said Tresawna. "I guess maybe I better go the other way."

"Not at all," said Buff warmly. "You were heading this way when I met you. It's the long way to Farewell, but I expect you've got reasons. I'll pick you a ford, Andy. There's one a mile upstream. Turn to the left!"

When they reached the ford, the way down to it was a narrow gully between cut banks, above which brush grew thickly. Here, at the head of the gully, Buff returned his gun to Tresawna.

"I unloaded it," he told Tresawna. "No," he added, as the other permitted himself a slight smile, "I haven't overlooked the rifle under your leg. I took a chance on that from the beginning. Go straight down the gully, and let me see you going straight after you reach the other side. The cottonwoods ain't growing so thick over there that I can't keep the sights on you till you're out of range."

"So long!" Tresawna said amiably. "See you later!"

"Maybe," rejoined the noncommittal Buff, and drew the Winchester from the scabbard under his left fender.

Tresawna held straight across the ford, passed through the cottonwoods lining the farther bank, and trotted out across the rising ground beyond—an easy slope which ended in a low ridge a mile away. Half-way up the slope, he turned in the saddle and looked back. He was above the cottonwoods on his own side of the creek, and he could see the gully where he had left Buff Warren. As he looked, he saw Buff wave an arm in ironic farewell, turn his horse, and ride away.

Tresawna looked to the front and kept on going. A hundred yards farther on he again hung his chin on his shoulder. Buff was passing out of sight beyond a swell.

"Here," said Tresawna, a wide and humorous smile adorning his thin lips—"here is where I shine!"

Passing over the crest of the ridge, he angled down the slope to a gap filled with a thin growth of young lodgepole pine. He rode back through the gap and headed up toward the ford. He did not hurry. There was plenty of time. It was necessary that Buff should be well on his way before Andy could risk coming out of the gully on the opposite side of the creek.

Tresawna chuckled as he rode. Although a gambler, he never attempted to conceal his feelings when such concealment was unnecessary. Now he felt that he was master of the situation.

He knew the route Buff would follow in driving the cattle back to the Fair place. It was the shortest way, and Buff would be almost sure to take it. Lying, as it did, in the low ground between the sprawling shoulders of two hills, it offered a rare opportunity for the ambush Tresawna had in mind. The low ground was not more than four hundred yards in width. Over all ranges up to six hundred yards, Andy rather fancied himself as a rifle shot.

He subjected his plan to the searching scrutiny of his excellent mind, and found no appreciable flaw. Of course, accidents might happen; but that is true of any undertaking.

"It's safe enough," he told himself. "That kid didn't see my face plain. Buff won't see or say anything again. The cattle can't talk."

He drew the rifle from under his leg and partly opened the breech, to make sure that a cartridge was in the barrel. There was one. He clicked the mechanism shut, and returned the rifle to the scabbard.

Against the man he intended to kill he felt no great animosity. This, partly because Buff had held him up in private, and partly because it was his habit to take a setback calmly. Nothing can be gained by becoming excited or thinking harsh thoughts of any one. Keep cool, remedy the setback, if necessary wiping out the person who stands in the way. That was the creed of Mr. Andrew Tresawna. It was one worthy of a better man.

Riding along the edge of the cottonwood belt bordering the creek, the gambler turned his horse's head when he saw the broken line of water marking the ford, and spurred down into the creek. Reaching the opposite shore, he rode in between the yellow banks of the gully.

Lost in contemplation of his clever plan for rendering Buff innocuous for all time, Tresawna did not see the rope that an expert arm pitched out of the bushes above his head. The shock of his surprise, when the loop jerked tight about his body and elbows, was truly appalling. He was still experiencing this mental agitation during his flight backward through the air at the end of the rope.

The impact, as he struck the earth, knocked the wind out of him. Through a fog of shimmery specks of light he saw the hazy face of Buff Warren; but he did not feel Buff's exploring fingers.

When the fog cleared away and he could see with comparative clarity, he saw Buff sitting tailor fashion in front of him, and discovered that he himself was bound like a roast in readiness for the oven. He could wiggle his fingers, but he did not wish to wiggle his fingers. He wished to perforate Buff Warren between the eyes.

No hint of this reprehensible desire appeared on his countenance. On the contrary, he smiled.

"Here we are again," remarked Andy Tresawna.

"For once you've told the truth," Buff said grimly. "Did you lose your way?"

"I forgot something."

"You've found it. You must have thought I went away from here when I rode over the rise."

"To tell the truth, I did."

"To tell the truth, I didn't. I came back through a gap like the one I expect you came through on the other side of the creek. I knew you'd try a play like this when I turned you loose. That's why I left your rifle. You think I overlooked it?"

A slow red mounted to the roots of Tresawna's pale hair. It was painfully evident that he had committed a grave error in craftsmanship. He had underestimated Buff. A man in his line of business should never underestimate any one or anything. That way lies failure.

"Don't take it so to heart," Buff advised, reading the telltale flush aright. "We all make mistakes."

"This here is one of yours," Tresawna drawled, still with the same pleasant smile.

"No threats! But I expect you'll shoot me in the back first chance you get. I don't know whether that would suit me. Are you open to argument, Andy?"

"What kind of an argument?"

"I'll put both our guns on that flat rock yonder, under the bank. Then I'll turn you loose. We'll start at the word, jump for the guns, and see what luck we have. How about it?"

"Suits me," was the succinct acceptance.

Buff arose, drew his six-shooter, and laid both it and the gambler's weapon on the flat rock. He returned to Tresawna and began to loosen the rope that bound him.

When his prisoner was released, Buff stepped back, and, watching Tresawna the while, began to coil his rope. Tresawna propped himself up on one hand, drew up his knees, and began to massage his ankles with his free hand.

"You pulled that rope too tight," he grumbled.

"You're hard to please," rejoined Buff, laying his neat coil of rope on the ground.

"I don't know that I can run as fast as you," Tresawna continued to complain.

"Oh, I guess you can. Say, Andy, you don't think you're making any impression on your ankles through those boots, do you? The leather's stiff as a cow's horn. Let's get it over with. I've got some other business to attend to."

"Pity you won't be there to attend to it," was Tresawna's sneer.

Buff made no comment. He expected that within the next sixty seconds either he or Tresawna would be dead. He felt neither anxious uncertainty nor that absolute confidence in the outcome experienced by many men on the brink of great events. Rather he felt as one confronted by a disagreeable job of work. There it was. A man had to do the best he could.

"Come on, Andy," said Buff. "Are you ready? Let's go!"

Tresawna rose to his feet. Buff, his head turned to watch his adversary, had set himself. Each man was about equally distant from the flat rock at the base of the cut bank.

"There's only one gun on that rock!" exclaimed Tresawna.

Instinctively Buff turned his head to look. As he did so, he sensed, rather than saw, the right arm of Tresawna fly up. Instinctively he ducked, and then desperately tried to make good his double error by starting headlong for the flat rock and his weapon; but the mischief was done. Although the stone Tresawna flung at him went wide, Buff, thrown off his balance by the twisting of his body in dodging, slipped and fell flat on his face.

He was up almost as quickly as he went down, but Tresawna was already stooping over the rock, his hands snatching at both revolvers.

Buff, believing in his heart that it was too late, nevertheless sprang forward on the off chance that something might happen; and something did. The gambler, still bent over the rock, had caught up both guns

and started to turn, when a projectile apparently composed of slender, brown-booted legs, billowing brown skirt, and flying honey-colored hair, shot over the edge of the cut bank and landed with both feet on the back of his neck.

Tresawna's face immediately struck the rock a most resounding smack. His body relaxed, even as Buff reached him and tore the guns from his limp grasp. Buff need not have been in such a hurry, for Andy Tresawna was definitely out.

XI

CALM, efficient, practical, that was Gilian. She sat on a rock, panting a little, with her elbows on her knees, and stared at the unconscious Tresawna.

"I guess I came just in time," she remarked judicially. "I ran that mule faster than he ever went in his life!"

"You shouldn't have come," Buff told her, with all the severity of an elder brother. "I told you not to. You said you wouldn't."

"No, I didn't. I only said, 'I expect so.' I'm always careful about the truth. It pays. I came mighty near missing you. It was luck I heard your voices. You were talking mighty loud. Now, don't be cross! I wanted to see what you'd do with the rustler. You don't *really* mind, do you?"

Gilian, with her head on one side—Gilian, with her amber eyes pleading with him—Gilian, eying him wistfully—an entirely different Gilian from the one who had told him to go away and never come back! All this, combined with the fact that she had just saved his life, reduced Buff to the consistency of melted butter.

"You shouldn't have come," he repeated weakly.

"When mother uses that tone, it means that everything is all right."

"You might have been hurt—badly hurt," he continued, still more weakly.

Gilian quite properly ignored this suggestion. She nodded toward Tresawna.

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Nothing," said Buff. "You'd better take your horse and ride home now. I'll be along later," he added, seeing that she made no move to get up.

"Thank you, I'll go when you do. I'm in this business now!"

"I—" began Buff.

"Oh, I know what you've got in mind. You'll try this over again, or something

equally dangerous, and I'm going to stay right here and see it through!"

Buff was aghast.

"But—"

"I think he's waking up," interrupted Gilian.

As she spoke, Tresawna turned over and groaned.

"I might 'a' knowed that horse would kick," muttered the gambler, without opening his eyes.

Gilian snickered appreciatively.

"He's still wandering in green fields," she murmured—which allusion, it must be said, was lost on Buff.

Tresawna opened his eyes. For a moment his glazed stare played over Buff unrecognizedly; then, slowly, comprehension filtered back into his numbed brain.

He struggled up on an elbow. He looked at the rock that had stopped his face. The surface of the stone was red with blood. He put his hand to his face. Palm and fingers came away redder than the stone.

"What hit me?" he demanded, apparently forgetful of the trickery with which he had striven to take Buff's life.

"You hit yourself—on that rock," replied Buff. "Don't make any sudden motion."

"I ain't movin'," declared Tresawna; "but I'm still curious. What hit me on the back of the neck before I hit the rock?"

"I did," Gilian took it upon herself to reply.

"You did?" inquired Tresawna, for the first time, seemingly, aware of the girl's presence.

Gilian nodded, her warm amber eyes looking squarely into his cold green pair.

"I'll try and not forget that," drawled Tresawna.

"You'd better forget," advised Buff.

"This gully is one right good place to leave a man!"

"Not this man," Tresawna declared with great confidence.

"Don't be too sure!"

"In a book, maybe. This is real life. That's why I don't mind being bad friends with you, Buff. I feel so safe." The gambler drew himself up a little higher, and beamed a crooked smile at Buff with his split lips. "Yes," he added, "I sure feel safe!"

Buff knew what the gambler meant, and knew that Tresawna knew that he knew it. His anger flared like tow.

"Tresawna, a coyote is a fair-playing animal alongside of you! When you feel you've pulled around enough to hold a gun, we'll—"

Gilian stifled a squeak of dismay with her hand. Tresawna looked at her.

"Don't worry, my girl," he said. "I've had about all the exercise I'm goin' to take to-day."

"We'll go across the creek and finish it up," insisted Buff.

"Why, no," contradicted Tresawna. "I wouldn't care for any."

"You're a worse coward than I thought!"

"No, only sensible. Sensible is one of my middle names, Buff. The other two are Slow and Sure. Everything will even up in the end. I don't mind waiting."

"I wonder, if I got your quirt—" began the thoroughly incensed puncher.

Tresawna shook his head.

"Wouldn't do a bit of good. You haven't the heart to hit a man when he's down. I'm down, and I ain't gettin' up."

"When you do get up, you'll walk. Come along, Gilian!"

"When you get through with my horse and my gun and my rifle," suggested the irrepressible Tresawna, dropping back on his elbow, "I'd take it kindly if you'd leave them at the Happy Heart. Just tell the bartender."

Buff did not reply. He picked up the trailing reins of Tresawna's horse, and Gilian and he started back to where the girl had left her mule.

"I expect we'd better hurry," said Buff. "The Bob twin must have told 'em there at the house."

"The Bob twin has done nothing of the sort. I knew he'd run and tell, and they'd worry, so I tied him to a cottonwood with a plow line."

"They must have heard him yell."

She shook her head.

"There was enough of the plow line left to gag him with."

Buff gazed at her with silent admiration.

"You do think of everything!" he said at last.

His heart was very full. This girl walking beside him had saved his life. Her beauty was the most alluring he had ever seen. Just to look at her called to mind everything good and sweet and pure that he had ever known.

When they had left the gully for the

woods, and were within a few steps of the mule, where he stood tied in the shade of a whispering cottonwood, a pebble turned under the ball of Gilian's foot. She stumbled and clutched at Buff's arm. Both his arms flew out to catch her, and somehow, as he caught her up, she swung against his chest.

The fragrance of her unbound hair was in his nostrils. The dam of his self-control gave way. He held her close and kissed her forehead, her closed eyelids, her lips; and when he kissed her lips, it seemed to him that she kissed him back.

For a breathless moment she lay passive. Then she thrust her two hands against his breast and strove to push him away.

"I love you," he muttered. "I've loved you from the moment I saw you there at the ranch."

"No! No!" she cried hysterically. "You mustn't! You're mad! You don't know what you're saying! Let me go!"

But he would not, and tried to kiss her mouth again. She ducked her head, and he only succeeded in kissing her hair.

"Let me go!" she commanded in strangled tones. "Do you want me to hate you?"

He let her go at this. She staggered away from him and clung to a cottonwood for support. He followed, pleading:

"I love you, don't you understand? I love you. I want you to marry me."

She looked at him wildly. Then, to his astonishment, she sank down on the ground, buried her face in her hands, and began to sob.

At once he was all contrition. He knelt beside her and slipped his arm around her shaking shoulders.

"Oh, God!" he heard the muffled whisper. "What have I done? Oh, I don't deserve—"

She pushed him away with her elbow. Helplessly he sat back on his heels and let her have her cry out. He did not watch her. To see her heaving bosom fighting for breath hurt him immeasurably. Her choking sobs tore at his heart. He swore under his breath.

At long last her hands came away from her tear-wet face. She did not look at Buff, but fumbled for her handkerchief and could not find it.

"Here," he said, and gave her his.

Forlornly she dabbed at her reddened eyes and dried her cheeks.

"I don't give way very often," she murmured with a twisted smile. She sat up straight and looked at him, her hands in her lap. "I think you and I had better have a little talk."

"I meant it, every word," he told her huskily. "I'm not sorry I kissed you," he added truthfully.

"If it will do you any good," said she, "I'm not sorry, either. I—I think I wanted you to. No, sit still. I've experienced quite enough emotion for one while. You and I are going to be sensible people from now on."

"If being sensible means not loving you, then count me out. I'd kiss you again, if I got the chance."

"I think not," she said with decision; "not if I don't want you to!"

"But you said—"

"I said I wanted you to that particular time. I didn't say I wanted you to make a practice of it, and I don't intend that you shall."

"But I love you!"

"That is not an adequate reason. You see, I don't love you."

"But you could learn."

She shook her head.

"Love doesn't come that way. I'm going to be honest with you. I can't marry you."

"Why not?"

"Oh, drat the man! I can't, and that settles it. You'll have to be satisfied with that."

"I ain't—not a bit. Do you like somebody else?"

"N-n-no, I don't."

"Then why haven't I a chance?"

"Because—" she began, and hesitated.

"Because why?"

"I can't tell you. You'll have to take my word for it."

"But I don't understand."

"Why should you?" She rose and dusted her skirts. "Just put me out of your mind, Mr. Warren. It's impossible—really it is. Don't think I'm ungrateful for all you've done. I am—beyond words. If I can ever return—but I can't; and I think it would be better if I didn't see you again."

"What?"

Gilian nodded.

"Indeed, it's much the better way—easier for both of us. I'll be going now. No, don't come with me. I can gather up these cattle myself."

She untied the check rein with which she had tied her mule, placed her hand on his withers, and vaulted lightly upon his bare back.

"Good-by!" she called over her shoulder, as she swung the mule around and kicked him into a gallop.

XII

BUFF, who had no intention of being dismissed in this summary fashion, threw himself across the saddle of Tresawna's horse and raced the fifty or sixty yards to where he had left Buster. Startled at this sudden onrush, the high-strung Buster promptly stripped his bridle and fled. Being somewhat speedier than Tresawna's horse, it was twenty minutes before Buff could pen him in some undergrowth and get a rope on him. By the time he had led him out into the open country, Gilian was nowhere in sight.

He picked up the hoofprints of her mule leading toward a swell half a mile away. When he was within three hundred yards of the low ridge, something struck a rock between the two horses and ricocheted with a sharp *szwe-e-e*. At the same instant, from a belt of woodland in his rear, there sounded the stirring crack of a rifle.

R-rip! Another bullet plugged the ground within ten inches of his mount's near forefoot.

Buff clapped home the spurs and went up the swell at racing gait. He swept over the top and down the reverse slope. If the marksman in his rear had fired again, the sound of the shot had been drowned in the thunder of hoofs. At any rate, neither he nor the two horses had been hit.

Buff spurred along the low ground under the swell and turned into a draw leading toward Packsaddle Creek. He had marked a certain patch of willows among the fringe of trees and brush bordering the creek, where the powder smoke had betrayed the bushwhacker, and he believed he stood a chance to make matters better than even.

As he galloped, he speculated as to how Tresawna had obtained a rifle. That the unseen enemy could be any one but Andy did not enter his head. Who else would wish to murder him? While it was more than possible that either Caltrap or Rum Gordon might eventually shoot him, they would do it in a reasonably fair way.

The place where he had marked the smoke was within two hundred yards of

the gully in which he had left Tresawna. Where the draw petered out in the low ground near the creek, he pulled his mount down to a trot. Although here the creek curved away from him in a wide bend, and he was hidden from the place where he had seen the powder smoke, he was taking no chances. The enemy might have come down stream. There was no knowing what he had done.

Buff safely reached the shelter of the cottonwoods, where he dismounted and tied both horses. Trailing his rifle, he ran to a young willow growing close to the edge of the cut bank of the creek, from behind which he was able to look across the bend to the mouth of the very gully where he had left Tresawna.

He did not see any one, or anything that looked suspicious. The sun shone, the creek water ran glassy clear in the shallows, the leaves of the cottonwoods whispered together, and that was apparently all.

As he knelt and watched the prospect, a cigarette butt, turning lazily in an eddy, gradually drifted in and began nuzzling the shore with little thrusting motions, almost as if it were trying to attract attention. It did.

Buff did not dare emerge from his place of concealment in order to inspect the tiny drifter more closely; but he could see enough to know that this was not the butt of a cigarette built after the usual fashion of that time and place. Its color and size showed that it was made of corn paper—that large species of cigarette paper termed "saddleblankets" in the vernacular of the Southwest.

Tresawna, in common with a few others, used white rice papers of the same size and shape as the brown wheat straw papers carried by Buff and most of the Territory's inhabitants.

What was there about this innocent-appearing butt to stir Buff's memory with a sense of familiarity? He did not know a soul who used such cigarette papers; but there it was. It aroused in Buff a faint suggestion of something evil; but with what particular piece of wickedness it was connected he could not think.

Buff did not know how long a butt would remain in the water before disintegrating, but he believed that it must have been dropped in that day, and not so far upstream. A stranger, as the smoker of corn paper cigarettes undoubtedly was, would in

all likelihood be on his way to the Bar S, to the Eighty-Eight, or to Farewell. Although these places lay in different directions, the ways to them all led through the gully where Buff had argued with Tresawna. Possibly, however, the stranger was wandering astray—in which event, as in dry weather, all signs would fail.

Crouching, alert as a fox, Buff made his way slowly and with extreme caution through the cottonwoods and brush. Well within a hundred yards of the would-be murderer's ambush, he lay down on his stomach and waited fifteen minutes before proceeding farther.

When he finally did proceed, his advance was made on his stomach. He wriggled like a snake to a point between two cottonwoods where a slight rise enabled him to command the bushwhacker's position.

Here again he waited—waited till a jay lit on one of the willows and began to scream for its mate.

"There can't be any one there," he told himself.

Nevertheless, when he once more started forward, it was with extremest caution and belly-flat. It was more than possible that the enemy had changed position. Indian fashion, he might be waiting at one side, ready to pour the lead into Buff when he should reach his objective.

Buff was no coward, but blind creeping toward possible death is an eerie proceeding. He felt the skin crawl between his shoulder blades.

Save for the whisper of the leaves of the cottonwood trees, it was very silent. The jay had stopped screaming. Head on one side, the bird watched Buff with a bright and speculative eye; and for the twelfth time he assured himself that there was no one there.

He wished that he had a saddle gun. His rifle was too long for the job in hand. It was difficult to handle among the brush and stiff-stemmed weeds.

The patch of willows looked very dense. It might be concealing two or three men. Possibly, too, some one was drawing a bead on him from that cluster of wild rose bushes near the bank of the creek. It was a situation sufficiently panicky. Buff hardened his heart like a fox hunter riding at a bullfinch with a bad take-off, and crawled on.

Twenty feet from the willows he heard a rustling in the tall grass growing between the trunks, and caught a momentary sight

of a dark brown shape. He flattened down, aimed his rifle, and waited while a man might draw three breaths. Then, its neat coat of dark brown hair almost concealing its defensive armament of gray-tipped quills, a large porcupine sedately marched out from among the willows.

The appearance of the porcupine clinched what the alighting of the jay had hinted at. There was no one lying concealed in the willow growth. Probably there was no one in the immediate vicinity.

Buff rose, and lowered the hammer of his rifle to the safety notch. The jay took instant flight. The porcupine waddled hurriedly away. Buff walked in among the willows.

He speedily found a spot where a man had evidently been lying on the grass. The bent blades were just beginning to straighten.

Buff knelt down and began to search about in the grass. Within five minutes he had picked up two forty-five-ninety cartridge cases and another cigarette butt. The tobacco was wrapped in the same corn paper as the one that came ashore at his feet. With his finger nail he picked open the paper. He discovered that the tobacco was long-cut and black. He held it to his nose. It smelled like Louisiana perique.

Carefully he tucked tobacco and paper into an empty tobacco bag that he had with him, and stowed it away in a vest pocket. The cartridge cases he dropped into another pocket. There was nothing distinctive about the cases; but Buff was not one to overlook any evidence, however flimsy.

He began to quarter the ground round about, looking for the place where the man's horse had been tied. After a long search he was on the point of breaking off when mere chance led him to look over the edge of the steep bank above the strip of beach—beach, that is, when the creek was low. Now, at high water, it was, as he expected, completely submerged; but—and this he had not expected—the freshet of the previous spring had made a rounded bar in the V between the bank and a fallen cottonwood. Two or three inches of this bar stood above the water line, making a patch of fairly dry ground two yards long by a yard wide, and offering, by virtue of the thick-foliaged cottonwood, whose main roots still clung to the bank, perfect concealment for even so large an object as a horse.

Deeply indented hoof marks on this strip of ground showed where a horse had stood. Abrasions on a root projecting from the bank showed where the bridle reins had been tied; but these things did not interest Buff so much as the prints of a man's boot-ed feet.

There were a dozen or more of these prints. Some of them overlay others, but five were as plain to see as print on a page. One especially—a print of the right foot—was a very autograph; for the outline of the sole, instead of turning to the left, as it ordinarily would, bent to the right. The wearer of that boot had a twisted foot.

The Twisted Foot!

An electric thrill tingled the length of Buff's spine. The hair rose at the back of his neck like the hackles of a bandog, as he instantly dropped behind the bush at his elbow. For he recalled the circumstances linking the saddleblankets to the Twisted Foot, that arch criminal of the Territory, who was frequently felt but rarely seen, and then only for the barest of snatched glimpses.

From the shelter of the bush Buff inspected the opposite shore with eyes that glittered. He could not understand why the Twisted Foot should devote so much attention to his insignificant self, unless the man were in league with Tresawna. This was improbable, for the Twisted Foot was a lone wolf, and, moreover, he had never been known to rustle so much as a calf.

Pondering this incongruity, Buff glanced along the top of the bank upon which he was lying. To the left was a log, the remains of a blasted cottonwood. It suddenly struck him that the grass between the log and a fringe of willows growing on the edge of the bank bore evidences of trampling. He crawled over to the log, and discovered unmistakable signs of two people having recently—very recently—been there.

One person had been sitting on the log. By the boot marks on the grass, the person had sat for at least an hour—probably not much longer. The grass and earth under the footprints were still wet with the moisture of the night. These marks were small, and had been made by the boots of either a small-footed man or a woman.

A yard creekward from the log, under a willow, was a small rock. In front of this rock were other bootmarks, indicating that the individual making them had been sit-

ting on the rock for about the same length of time as his vis-à-vis on the log. Once again Buff's spinal column tingled, for the mark made by the sitter's right boot was unmistakably that of the Twisted Foot.

Nosing onward, Buff found behind the log a heavily trampled space, where the Twisted Foot had apparently camped all night—all night, because the spot where he had made his bed was absolutely dry. Farther on still was cropped grass in a twenty-foot circle about an old alder stub. Here his horse had been tied for the night. To the same tree, after the shod horse of the Twisted Foot had been led away, a bare-footed horse had been tied for not much longer than an hour. The footprints of its rider were plain to read.

Buff reconstructed what had happened. The Twisted Foot had made a fireless camp. In the morning he had saddled and led his horse from the tree to which it had been tied all night, down the bank, to the bar inside the fallen cottonwood. Then had come the other rider, the woman or small-footed man, who had tied her or his horse to the same tree, and then had sat down on the log and held an hour's conversation with the Twisted Foot. After that, this person had returned to the alder stub, untied the horse, and ridden away.

Of one thing Buff was certain—this mysterious small-footed person was not Tresawna. The footprints were much too small.

As yet Buff had found only four cigarette butts made with the black tobacco and the saddleblanket papers. He wondered if the person who had sat on the log smoked. He began to poke about in the untrampled grass behind the log, in search of possible evidence. His quest was not rewarded by cigarette butts, but under the curve of the log he found something else—a handkerchief, tightly wadded into a ball. Carefully he opened up and spread out the handkerchief on the ground. Then he caught his breath with a gasp, for the handkerchief had a blue, three-striped border. The first time he saw Gilian she was wearing just such a handkerchief knotted around her neck; and he recalled that when he saw her in the field that morning, her neck was bare.

Then came a reaction.

"It can't be Gilian!" he told himself. "What truck could she have with the Twisted Foot?"

There were the marks of the small boots, and there was the handkerchief—a most uncommon handkerchief; but there must be others of that pattern. There were other woman's-size boots, too. The doubt began to ooze from his heart.

Before he folded the handkerchief, however, it began to flow back with renewed force; for he recalled an oddity in one of the hoof marks of the barefooted horse ridden by the person with the small feet. The print of the wall of one of the hoofs—which one he did not remember—was not continuous. There was a break in its curve about two inches from the heel.

Now Gilian's bay was barefooted, and, the last time he saw it, it had such a break on the outside of one of its fore hoofs. If his memory was correct, it was not a quarter crack—which usually occurs on the inside of the hoof, where the wall is weaker—but a simple break in the wall.

Squatting on his heels, Buff stared miserably at the plot of trampled ground around the alder stub. He knew that he must examine those hoofprints once more, and he dreaded what he might find—what he felt sure he would find. Other horses had breaks in their hoofs, but—

Lugubriously, heavily, his heart a dull, pounding ache, he crawled across to the alder stub and subjected the marks to another examination. When he finished, the sunshine had pretty well gone out of his world. It was the near fore of the barefooted horse that had the break in the wall of its hoof.

He had tried to delude himself that it was a hind hoof, but he was too much of a horseman for that. He knew better, and, knowing better, there was nothing for it but to pursue his investigation to its logical end. If the telltale break in the hoof wall was on the near *forefoot* of Gilian's horse, the matter would be clinched beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Indeed, in Buff's mind, the question was clinched already. The evidence was too terribly convincing.

After a time—how long a time he did not know—he decided to visit the gully where he had left Tresawna.

XIII

BUFF parted the bush leaves slightly and looked down upon Andy Tresawna. The gambler, his back to Buff, was solemnly playing solitaire.

"A red seven!" he was muttering, stripping off the cards three at a clip and turning them over. "A red jack! Come a black king! Here he is—the red and one-eyed jack; and," he added, raising his voice, "there's a two-eyed jack looking through that bush right over my head!"

For a breath Buff was taken aback—long enough to give Tresawna the opportunity to drawl insultingly:

"I was wondering how soon you'd be here. That's why I propped my little pocket mirror in front of me. Who's doing all the shooting, Buff?"

All the while Tresawna was making his card combinations.

"Who's your friend?" demanded Buff, accepting the situation.

"Friend!" exclaimed Tresawna in a slightly louder voice. "I haven't any friend here."

The last word of the sentence was uttered in a tone audible at a hundred yards.

"Never mind trying to call him back," Buff enjoined the gambler. "You yell like that again, and you'll strain something besides your voice!"

"Can't I talk?" grumbled Tresawna, his head bent, his hands busy with the cards.

"No need to."

"Well, I like that!" he exclaimed, pivoting on one hip to face Buff.

The latter noticed that the gambler had washed his face. Except a swelled nose and a black eye, there was little to show that he had recently been run through the mill.

"You may have me hog-tied and helpless," Tresawna went on, "but it ain't necessary to rub it in. I don't know what's the matter with you, Buff. Anybody would think you owned the earth. You've got more nerve than anybody I know. I—"

"Shut up!" Buff interrupted in a whisper, aiming his revolver at the same time.

Tresawna's mouth continued open. He was plainly of two minds whether to obey; but the cold eyes behind the six-shooter were too convincing. He closed his mouth.

It was at this juncture that a stick snapped not twenty yards in the rear of Buff. The latter saw it all in a flash—saw the trap they had prepared in order to make sure of him—saw it as he jumped off the bank almost on top of Tresawna.

The latter, in a flurry, jerked a derringer from under his vest and fired point-blank at Buff. Almost at the same instant the puncher shot him in the head. The gam-

bler swayed sidewise, dropped the derringer, clapped both hands to his head, and crumpled to the ground.

Buff scooped up the fallen derringer, dropped it into his pocket, and ran up the gully to a low place in the cut bank.

As he placed the flat of his hand on the top of the bank, preparatory to vaulting up, a rifle cracked in the underbrush and a bullet smacked dirt in his eyes. Buff promptly abandoned this particular spot, and, blinking rapidly, fled onward along the gully like a wild thing—which he was, in more senses than one.

Where the gully bent to the north and came out upon the flat, beside a tiny mound, out of which grew two fair-sized cottonwoods, he flung himself down.

Bang! Thud! A bullet ripped through one of the cottonwoods not six inches over his head, showering his back with splinters. Buff flattened his long body behind the mound. Again the rifle spoke. A bullet scored the earth at one side of the mound, where his feet would have been, if he hadn't had the presence of mind to pull them up.

Once more the rifle sent its message; and now the bullet tucked into the ground at the other end of the mound, within six inches of Buff's head.

"Treed!" Buff said to himself. "Treed! I can't move ahead, back, or sidewise!"

Doubling the brim of his hat, he held it by his finger tips, and slowly elevated the crown above the grass growing on the top of the mound. Nothing happened.

He moved the hat to and fro. With foolhardy bravado he swept a hand in an arc above the mound. This piece of impertinence was well-nigh disastrous. The enemy's weapon made instant response to the challenge, and Buff felt a sharp pain shoot through his hand and wrist that numbed his arm to the elbow.

At first he thought he was wounded; but it was only a pebble, thrown up by the bullet, that had struck him.

Buff tenderly massaged his nerveless fingers, and reflected upon his own crass folly. He would have liked to return to the gully. There, at least, were banks, behind which a man could stand; but between the gully and the mound were six feet of bare ground open to the enemy's fire, and Buff decided to remain where he was.

He yearned to take a shot at his enemy. Judging by the sound, the rifleman was not more than fifty yards away. Buff wriggled

ahead slightly. Carefully he pushed his gun muzzle forward. Then he changed his mind, and, squirming round, prepared to try a left-handed shot from the other end of the mound. He conjectured that his ill-wisher would not be expecting one from that end.

In this he was mistaken. Hardly had his gun barrel begun tentatively to part the grass stems when a bullet parted them in sheer earnest.

Buff stared bitterly at a clump of trees on his right, marking a spring. It was not more than three hundred yards away, and it could be reached from the trees lining the creek without being seen. If the man did the obvious thing, and made himself snug in the clump, Buff would be in a remarkably tight hole; for he would be unable to tell, till fired on, whether the man had changed position or remained where he was.

Buff brought forth his pocket knife and began to scrape out a hole in the ground. He realized painfully that the several hours to be dragged through before sunset would be packed with excitement sufficient for three men. If he could hold out till dark, he had nothing to fear; but "if" is a tremendous word. Buff worked his knife a little faster.

A distant shout smote his eardrums. He stared eastward, and the dipping white tilt of a wagon met his eye. As he looked, it reeled down into a gully. Another shout, and the thin crack of a whip. The heads of two straining horses appeared, to be followed by the white tilt aforesaid.

"Cap'n Burri!" muttered Buff, recognizing the wagon and team as those belonging to a tin peddler of his acquaintance. "He's heading straight for this gully. If my quick-shooting friend ever cuts down on him—"

He rolled over on his side and cupped his hands to shout:

"Hi, cap'n! Cap'n! G'way from here!"

It is doubtful whether, above the creaking rattle of the wagon and the clashing clatter of his stock in trade, the captain heard the warning shout. He kept on coming.

The murderous person among the cottonwoods fired a shot that kicked up the dirt slightly to the left of the advancing team. The captain pulled up. There came another shot, which bored the ground on the

right. Captain Burr stood up on the dashboard and peered ahead from beneath a flattened palm.

A third shot sang over Buff's head, and must have served the captain likewise, for he sat down abruptly, swung his horses to the right, and sent them into their collars with voice and lash.

"I'll bet he's mad!" was Buff's inward comment. "He'll have to drive two miles out of his way to reach the next ford!"

He watched the tin peddler's wagon disappear behind the clump of trees that marked the spring. When it disappeared, the noise of its passage ceased.

"I guess maybe he ain't in such a hurry to reach the next ford, after all," muttered Buff to his Winchester.

Five minutes later the surmise was proved correct by the heavy roar of a Sharp's buffalo gun.

The captain, although an excellent and up-to-date business man, was reactionary to his finger tips in the matter of offensive weapons. He clung to the Sharp's buffalo, the Spencer carbine, the sawed-off Greener of the gold days, and the bowie evolved from a file. His sole concession to modernity in arms of precision was a forty-five Colt's revolver.

The Sharp's was preëminently his favorite. As he frequently observed, when cleaning and oiling his pet:

"She's only a single-shot, but she sho' makes 'em sick!"

Buff grinned with delight as the buffalo roared again. The captain was evidently striving to "make 'em sick."

"I'll have to do something now my own self," was his thought.

He wriggled around, and, seizing the opportunity when his enemy was replying to the captain's challenge, bounced out from behind the mound and dived down into the gully like a homing woodchuck. Quick as he was, the other man almost dropped him with a bullet that whined within a foot of his head.

"We've got him now!" was Buff's conclusion, as he ran to the low place from which he had been driven earlier in the day.

But his judgment was too sanguine. Even as he shoved his gun barrel above the edge of the bank, he heard a sounding splash in the creek.

Instantly he began to run down the gully at top speed. The body of Tresawna was

lying across the gully. Taking it in his stride, Buff was checked in mid air by the suddenly upflung arm and hand of the apparently lifeless gambler—checked in mid air and spilled ignominiously on his face.

His rifle had flown from his hand as he fell. When he scrambled to his feet, he saw it, butt upward, the muzzle rammed five inches deep in the soft earth of the cut bank.

Here was a decided contretemps. With a sanded barrel, the rifle was useless. Shaken somewhat by this, but more by Tresawna's seeming resurrection from the dead, Buff dragged out his six-shooter and ran on to where the gully opened out on the shore of the creek.

He was in time to catch a tantalizing glimpse of a shadowy figure disappearing behind a willow bush on the farther bank. Buff at once threw five shots into that willow bush. Somebody laughed, harshly, derisively. Branches snapped and crackled before the impulse of a large, rapidly moving body. A horse's hoofs began to drum upon the earth. The sound dwindled and died.

Buff lifted up his voice and shouted for Captain Burr.

"Who's there?" called a voice from the bushes some forty yards down stream.

"It's me, cap'n—Buff Warren."

"What you shootin' at me fo'?"

"I wasn't shootin' at you, cap'n. Come on, and I'll explain."

Captain Burr, a wiry, brisk, little man, jumped off the bank and landed in the bed of the gully with all the elasticity of a man of one-third his years.

"Howdy, Buff?" said he, and shook hands ceremoniously. "How do I find you?"

"Alive. I'm glad you came."

"My only regret is that I did not arrive sooner. Who's the otheh man?"

"Tresaw—oh, him? I only saw about three inches of his back and the upper part of one boot."

"I'm sorry. I was in hopes that between the two guns we could teach the damned scoundrel a lesson! Fah be it from me, suh, to thrust myself upon another gentleman's private quarrel; but when I am shot at, honeh compels me to reply. I trust you will not take my intrusion unkindly."

"Don't apologize, cap'n. If you hadn't come, I don't know what kind of a time I'd have had."

"Of co'se you would have shot him eventually," the captain insisted gallantly. "What had the ruffian done?"

"Outside of shootin' at me, I don't know a thing against him. I think he's a friend of Tresawna's."

"That's something else against him, at any rate. Is that Tresawna yonder?"

Buff nodded.

"I thought I'd killed him, but I guess I was mistaken."

"I hope not," said the captain frankly. "I've always thought Tresawna would stand hanging. It may be hanging, after all. I just saw his foot move. Shall we stroll up and look him oveh?"

Before they reached Tresawna, the gambler raised his hand and arm in the same gesture that had tripped Buff.

"Mahk the fo'ce of habit, suh," observed the captain. "He thinks he's dealin' the cahds."

He sank down on his knees beside Tresawna, and ran expert fingers over the man's scalp. His hand halted, the fingers prodded. He looked up at Buff Warren.

"Youah bullet grazed his skull ratheh deeply, but I'm afraid he will recoveh. If you will get me some wateh, Buff, I'll cut away his hair and put on a compress and a bandage."

XIV

THE captain dropped a rawhide pull-through down the barrel of his Sharp's, and began to wipe out the gun with great care. His small, neat, white beard was fairly bristling with indignation.

Buff was squatting on his heels beside Tresawna, who, limp as the proverbial rag, palely green beneath his tan, his head tied up in his own bandanna, was sitting propped against the bank.

"Wohds fail me," remarked the captain, cocking an angry eye at the gambler. "A rustleh desehves no mehcy!"

"I was going to see him later," explained Buff, "when he pulls around again. No use taking it to court, cap'n. Outside of a kid, I'm the only witness, and you know how hard it is to tie a charge of rustling onto anybody. He could claim the cattle were going his way, and he was riding along behind them."

Captain Burr's teeth shone in a wolfish smile.

"Ouah co'ts ah lamentable, and the law they deal in is wo'se; but I have in my

wagon a brand-new rope. Theah is an excellent selection of trees hereabout. Heah ah the three of us. What mo' could a gentleman ask?"

"I tell you," burst forth Tresawna, "it's just like Buff says! I only happened to be going along the same way as the cattle!"

"It was an unfo'tunate happening," said the captain smoothly. "It won't occur again."

"But look here, cap'n!" Tresawna persisted desperately. "I don't mind taking chances against a gun, but I don't like the idea of being hung!"

"I don't see why. They say it's a right easy death—like drownin'."

Tresawna shuddered.

"But—"

"Now, now, don't get excited, Tresawna. You ain't been actin' like you should. Even if you weren't tryin' to rustle these particular cattle, you've been mighty active otheh ways. Why, to my cehtain knowledge, since you've been in the country, you ain't done nothin' but steal and lie and cheat and vote the Prohibition ticket!"

"I ain't fit to die!" groaned Tresawna.

"Yes, you ah," insisted the captain. "You know what I think? I think you ah only makin' excuses to get off. You ought to be ashamed of you'self. You ah makin' a lot of fuss oveh nothing. I'll guarantee to bury you afte'wahds, and mahk the spot so yo' friends can find you."

Tresawna tried to throw himself on his knees. He only succeeded in groveling. He scrabbled about with his hands between the captain's boots. He made incoherent, animal sounds. He wept.

"Tell you what, Andy," said the captain, with his wicked smile. "Tell us who your friend was, make a clean breast of the whole job, and maybe it won't be necessary to stretch you."

"No, no, I can't!" cried Andy, and continued to scrabble and weep.

The captain stood up and drew away with distaste. He wound his pull-through on two fingers and tucked the rawhide away in his pocket.

"I might as well get the rope," he said to Buff.

Buff was fairly aghast at the unexpected turn events had taken. He had no desire that Tresawna should be pumped. He feared that disaster for Gilian lay that way. At all costs she must be protected; but how, with the brisk captain talking rope?

"Wait a shake, cap'n," Buff said, determined to prevent the tin peddler from satisfying his fell desire to rid the world of a rascal. How to fob off without arousing his suspicions, Buff did not know. With a gentleman like the captain it was a problem. "Wait a shake, cap'n."

"Gawd bless you, Buff!" yammered Tresawna, transferring his attentions to Buff's boots. "You won't let him hang me? You'll stand by me, won't you, Buff?"

This from his would-be murderer! Buff observed with some curiosity the amazing spectacle of Tresawna. He wondered greatly that a man who had previously displayed a fair amount of courage should react so strongly to the suggestion of death by the rope. It was a thing worth knowing.

"I don't know why we should wait," grumbled Captain Burr. "He's guilty as hell!"

"I think he's more valuable alive than dead. If we don't hang him, there's always a chance he'll talk," Buff insisted, trusting that this would be the last thing Tresawna would do.

"Then let him talk," said the captain. "Give it a name, Tresawna!"

The sweat of terror stood in little drops on Tresawna's low forehead. His eyes were glassy. His mouth trembled. Yet he shook his head.

"I don't know anything," he muttered.

"You'd better speak out," advised the captain.

Tresawna shook his head. He no longer groveled. He sank back against the cut bank.

"Why waste time thisaway?" said the captain.

An ague seized Tresawna. He trembled from head to foot, but his jaw muscles stood out with the strain of his locked jaws.

"I suppose we might as well," assented Buff.

The captain departed for his brand-new rope. When he was gone, Tresawna opened his eyes.

"You ain't going to hang me, Buff!" he said in a shaky voice. "You can't do that, any more than you could shoot me when I was down."

"You tried to shoot me when I was down," replied Buff, struggling with his problem.

"That's different," Tresawna had the brazenness to say. "I ain't like you—not at all. You can't hang me, Buff! You

won't let the captain do what you won't do, will you?" Then, as Buff's face remained impassive, he added: "You'd have let me go if it wasn't for Cap'n Burr. You know damned well you would!"

"Taken you to jail, more likely, after this last trick you tried to turn!"

"But you wouldn't hang me! You wouldn't do that! Say you wouldn't, Buff! And don't let the captain! Don't let him, Buff!"

"Well," drawled Buff slowly, "it don't look right to hang you, somehow. I'll talk to the captain, Andy. I'll do what I can."

Tresawna immediately began to bespatter him with gratitude.

Buff barely heard what the gambler said. He had nearly decided that the best plan would be to permit Tresawna to escape then and there.

While he was still pondering the merits of the plan, Joe Mack, the sheriff of Farewell County, rode into the gully. Tresawna immediately took heart of grace.

"I guess the captain won't hang me now," said he to Buff.

"This seems to be your lucky day," admitted Buff, wishing that he had not consumed so much time in formulating his plan for getting Tresawna out of the way.

The sheriff rode up, checked his horse, and greeted the two politely. Then his eyes fastened on Tresawna.

"Hurt bad, Andy?"

"Scratch, Joe. This fellah here, Buff Warren, and Cap'n Ben Burr are fixin' to hang me."

The sheriff's brows drew together. He was invariably strong for law and order when the said law and order did not in any way conflict with the concerns of the vested interests.

"Where's Cap'n Burr?" he asked.

"Gone for a rope," said Buff.

"I guess that rope won't be used to-day," the sheriff declared importantly. "Not while I'm here. You ought to know better, Buff. Can't allow folks to take the law into their hands thisaway. It ain't legal, and it gives the county a bad name. If you wanted to rub him out, you should shoot him deeper and harder, or—what's Tresawna done, anyway?"

"I caught him rustling a cow and a calf, ten heifers, and a bull."

"You did, huh? That's bad, Andy. I'll have to take you along with me. Rustling cattle is something that has got to be

stamped out—you can stick a pin in that. When you go back, Buff, you might as well tell Sam Caltrop I took Tresawna with me. The hearing will be to-morrow. You'll have to appear, Buff. Better ask Sam to come with you."

Buff shook his head.

"I'll be there, but I don't think Sam Caltrop will. You see, Joe, they weren't his cattle."

"Whose cattle were they?" the sheriff asked quickly.

"Man by the name of Fair."

"Fair? Fair? I don't know any Fairs living around here!"

"He's taken McFluke's old place."

The sheriff frowned.

"I heard there was a nester there. So these are his cattle!"

"Yeah."

The sheriff scratched his shaven chin and looked down his long nose at the curling ends of his sweeping mustache. He wished that he had not made such a fine gesture in the matter of Farewell County rustling. Caltrop's cattle were one thing, but a nester's beasts were quite different. The sheriff swore inwardly and heartily damned the infernal luck.

"It 'll be kind of hard making a rustling charge stick," he said slowly, and then added, with meaning, "for a nester's little bunch."

"It 'll be no harder than for a big company bunch," Buff declared sharply; "and that's hard enough, Gawd knows!"

"Any other witnesses besides you, Buff?"

"I'm the only one except a kid."

"Kid's evidence ain't ever worth much. What brand are the cattle carrying?"

"None."

"No brand, only you as a witness, and nester's stuff into the bargain! The case won't even go to trial, Buff. The judge will turn him loose at the hearing. It's hardly worth while my taking him in."

"But you will take him in—unless the law doesn't apply to nesters' cattle."

"Of course it applies," the sheriff exclaimed testily. "What makes you think it doesn't?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. What time is the hearing?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"I'll bring the kid, too."

"It's hardly necessary, Buff. I know about what the judge will say; but bring

the kid if you want to. Howdy, cap'n? How are you this fine day?"

"I ain't feelin' so good," grumbled the captain, fondling with affectionate fingers the stiff coils of a thirty-five-foot rope. "I don't have to be a mind readeh to know what you ah goin' to do. I don't know when I've been less glad to see anybody, sheriff!"

The sheriff laughed.

"Of course, if I hadn't happened to come along, I don't know that there'd have been any particular objection to you stretching Tresawna. Irregular, maybe, but such things will happen. I'm broad-minded enough to see that, I hope, just like you see I can't let you hang Andy right under my eyes. He'll have his hearing to-morrow, Andy will."

"I'll bet they tuhn him loose," grieved the captain.

"I'm bettin' that way myself," concurred the sheriff; "but of course the law has to be complied with. That's what I'm here for, you know. Your wagon anywhere around, captain?"

"Down by the spring."

"I'd take it as a favor if you'd drive up here, so we can carry Tresawna to town."

The captain was understood to curse Tresawna and all his works, adding:

"And I lose a trip, besides. I was bound out."

"Can't be helped," insisted the sheriff. "I've got to get Andy to town soon as possible."

The captain swore again, remarking in his rage that there was no justice any more, anywhere. He departed, still swearing, and Buff went with him.

"Did you tell Joe about what Tresawna and the otheh man tried to do to you, Buff?" asked the captain, untying his team.

"No, I didn't. That part is between Tresawna, the other fellah, and me," replied Buff.

"And me," amended the captain softly. "You must not deny me this simple pleasure, suh. I am getting on in years, and it is only such little incidents as these that keep my bones and interest alive; but you are right not to tell the sheriff. The quarrel is ouahs, and ouahs alone."

"I don't want to drag you in, cap'n."

"Not another word, suh—not another word! Heah's some baling wiah, Buff, to clean yo' rifle with. Bettah luck next time. Damn it, suh, I never saw any one so stub-

born as Andy Tresawna! If the sheriff hadn't come along, I honestly believe we'd have had to hang him."

Buff, cleaning his rifle, wondered what the captain would have said had he known he had been exchanging shots with the Twisted Foot. Were it not for the incriminating handkerchief in his pocket, the puncher would have told his ally; but where Gilian was concerned his mouth was shut. That part of the case he intended to handle himself. Neither the law nor any one else, if he could help it, should have lot or part in it.

Tresawna? Another loose end. But Buff did not believe that the gambler, with the fear of death by the rope removed, even though jail should hold him for a time, would be likely to weaken to the extent of actual blabbing.

Buff returned to the Fair place on the Lazy that afternoon. What he would do with the evidence, when he found the last link, he did not know. To go straight to Gilian with it would be the best plan—a man's job, too; but he did not relish the idea.

Fording the river above the house, and passing through the cottonwoods, he saw that the potential cornfield had been completely harrowed, and that Mrs. Fair, Jemima, and the twins were planting the seed. All four were working like nailers.

He could not see Gilian's horse. There were the mules, hobbled, grazing down by the river. Farther on were the cattle, solemnly cropping, with their heads all turned one way. A thin smoke was rising behind the stable and sheds.

He rode past the house, ascended the ridge, turned the corner of a shed, and saw Gilian's bay horse tied short by the head to a wheel of a wagon. Gilian, her hair in a hastily twisted club, one of the bay's hind legs gripped tightly between her youthful knees, was tacking on a shoe.

As he came up, she threw him a quick, frowning glance, and reached for the clinching iron.

"Let me do that," he managed to say, dismounting.

"This is the last hoof," said she, clinching the nails with an expert hammer.

He saw that it was indeed the last hoof, and that in none of the hoofs, either inside or outside, fore or hind, was there the slightest indication of a break. What evidence there had been, if any, was safely concealed

in the parings and nippings of horn that lay scattered about.

If Gilian had wished to destroy evidence, she could not have done a better job. Part of the blacksmith's remedy for a corn is paring and rasping down the sole and wall of the quarter, so that when the shoe is clinched no portion of the cut down section shall bear upon the shoe, thus relieving all pressure on the corn. If there is a break in the wall of the quarter—a simple break, not a sand crack, you understand—this cutting down process removes it effectually.

Buff could not see that Gilian had cut away more of the hoof than was absolutely necessary to relieve an ordinary corn. He was compelled to admit, too, that she had done an expert job. No blacksmith could have given those nails a stronger clinch. She lowered the hoof, stepped away, and tidily gathered up her tools.

"He's been going tender for'ard lately," she said.

"Corns?" said Buff.

She nodded.

"Outside of each fore. That's why we've been letting him go barefoot. It helped him a little, I guess. I only wish I had a bar shoe! A plain shoe springs too much." She went to the horse's head and began to untie him: "Easy, boy, easy! Nobody's going to hurt you."

He watched her jealously, and with despairing admiration. She had kissed him, she had said she wanted him to kiss her, and then she had definitely given him his dismissal. By God, he would not be sent packing!

He saw the sunshine on her bright hair. He was aware of the curves of her neck and chin, the swell of her bosom under the flannel shirt, the movements of her brown, skillful hands. He knew that no matter what she had done, no matter what she was, he loved this girl.

The Twisted Foot! Buff would see that she did not meet him again. Henceforth he would stand between her and whatever sinister influence lay in that direction. On the spur of this exalted mood he resolved to return to her the handkerchief he had found, and to argue her into a reasonable frame of mind. This decision made him feel highly magnanimous and condescending—which is not good for a young man.

"His feet need a good soaking every day," Gilian was saying. "His hoofs are getting brittle. Why, there was a break—"

Buff came back to earth with a severe jar.

"Yes, yes," he broke in hurriedly; "but it doesn't matter. Nothing matters."

"A break in the wall of the quarter of the off fore," went on Gilian, scowling at the interruption. "What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Not a thing," he told her with a fatuous smile.

She did not return the smile, but continued to scowl.

"I don't know what on earth you had to come traipsing down here for. I told you to keep away, didn't I?"

This was a red-hot shot, but he was not touched. There was something in his pocket that would make her change her tune. Wait until he should give her the handkerchief! He drew it from his pocket.

"I had to come," said he, handing her the handkerchief. "You see, I found this."

She regarded the handkerchief, unmoved.

"You found this, did you? Well, what's it got to do with me?"

"It's yours, isn't it?"

He kept nodding at her, as if to convey that everything was all right with him, and that he would stick by her through thick and thin.

"No," she said sharply. "It is not mine. I have only one handkerchief like this one that I usually wear around my neck. Here it is."

As she spoke, she pulled from the pocket of her skirt a handkerchief precisely similar to the one Buff had found.

"I usually wear it around my neck, but I took it off to-day, it was so hot. I suppose you saw I didn't have it on, and you thought I'd lost it. Then you went and bought this one, so that you could come here on the pretense of returning it to me. Oh, clever, very! How can you be so crude? This makes me sick! Besides, Mr. Warren, all my handkerchiefs have a capital G embroidered in one corner, like this one. The one you—uh—found has no initial on it. Here, take it!"

It was impossible not to believe her. Buff felt as one who has been blown off his feet. He clawed madly for the solid earth.

"But—but," he stammered, "weren't you on Packsaddle Creek this morning?"

"You know perfectly well that I was there with you."

"I mean before that."

She whitened to the lips.

"Before that!" she repeated. "Why, no, of course not!"

But now he did not believe her. She was too patently lying. He stepped close to her.

"I can just about guess what's bothering you—" he began.

She recoiled.

"What?" she gasped. "What do you mean?"

"You tell me your trouble, and I'll fix it for you. Leave it to me. I want to help you."

Her eyes narrowed. She had begun to pull herself together. She drew a long breath.

"Have you been spying on me?"

Manlike, he was indignant. Naturally he lied.

"Of course I haven't been spying on you. What do you think I am?"

"I'm not sure whether you're a natural born idiot or a—"

She did not complete the sentence.

"Or a what?" he prompted.

"Never mind! You'd better be going. Too bad the handkerchief isn't mine. Good-by!"

"Well, anyway," he snapped vindictively, "you kissed me back!"

"That's right—fling my folly in my face! Rub it in! Shame me all you can!"

"Damn it, I tell you I love you!"

"Swear at me now! That comes next, I suppose. What a fine, manly person you are! What—"

"Look here!" he broke in desperately, his backbone reduced by her show of passion to the consistency of mush and milk. "Look here, can't you get it into your head that I want to help you all I can?"

"What a fussbudget it is!" she exclaimed, achieving one of her bewildering transitions of mood and expression. "I don't need any help really; but you seem to need soothing. You look a little wild about the eyes. Come on down to supper, and be soothed!"

He followed the girl, uneasily conscious that he was being beguiled, befooled, and bamboozled.

XV

AFTER supper Buff and Mr. Fair sat side by side in chairs tilted back against the wall. The blind man, busy with his own thoughts, smoked in silence—for which Buff was glad. He was in no mood for idle

conversation, being in the condition best described as a sorry state of mind.

He had gone through a good deal that day. Excitement, passion, anger, the will to give death or take it—all had swayed him since the dawn. There remained now a curiously flat feeling of bewilderment.

What was the answer to the riddle? Gilian had told him the truth about the handkerchief—of that he was certain; but he was equally certain that she had lied in denying that she had gone to Packsaddle before she followed him there. As to her statement that the quarter break was in the bay's off fore, he did not know what to think; yet, if the first assertion were true, the other two should have been also true. If the last two were lies, so should the first have been. The more he thrashed at the matter in his befogged mind, the more bewildered he became.

From the welter of equivocal circumstance three facts at last emerged—she had desired him to kiss her at least once, she loved no one else, and she needed help. Above all, she needed help. The seeming contradictions of the case, her distress, her very denial that she needed aid, were as instinct with the call to lend a hand as minute guns at sea.

But how? How do you save people who refuse to be saved? Buff did not know, but he was a hopeful soul. If he could get Gilian off by herself for ten minutes, away from the bothering family, it might be possible to make her see his side of it.

If he could only kiss her again! The memory of their first kiss filled his veins with wild fire. His heart beat to suffocation. He caught his breath, and stirred on the chair. She had kissed him back! That was everything.

He watched her with her mother and sister, as she wiped the supper dishes, and marveled that she could talk and laugh with such light-hearted abandon.

"She's sure game!" he told himself.

Suddenly Mrs. Fair began to speak of the impending trial, and Buff was forced to wrench his thoughts from Gilian. Later, when she went out, he rose to follow, but Mrs. Fair stopped him with—

"Oh, Mr. Warren, would you mind looking at the shotgun? It doesn't seem to eject properly."

He inspected the shotgun. So far as he could see, the mechanism worked perfectly. He said as much, but Mrs. Fair was not

satisfied, nor was Jemima. They kept him fiddling with it for a good fifteen minutes.

After that it was the churn that needed his expert attention. He knew enough about churns to perceive at once that it was in as perfect order as was the shotgun. Under Jemima Fair's eye he perforce took the infernal thing apart.

Jemima stepped into the next room for a moment. Mrs. Fair was at the stove, with her back toward him. Beside Buff was an open window. Quietly he laid the elmwood dasher on the chair and slipped over the window sill. Once in outer darkness, he stooped, quietly removed his spurs, stuffed them into a pocket, and stood listening.

Near the Lazy, a young heifer bawled for her mother. Somewhere in the cottonwoods sounded the swishing swoop of mighty wings, followed by a queerly human cry of distress. An owl had caught a cotton-tail. A night-flying beetle blundered into Buff's face, and caromed off, buzzing angrily. Somewhere upon the ridge a horse stamped—his horse, probably. He moved up the slope of the ridge, and called softly:

"Gilian!"

But no Gilian made reply. The owl hooted eerily, the lonely heifer bawled again, and there was silence.

He retraced his steps and started in the direction of the cornfield. Tink! On the west side of the field a shot hoof clinked against a rock. One of the mules, or the bay, must have strayed in that direction. Buff halted irresolutely. He whispered sharply:

"Gilian!"

The night was very still. He listened. Was that the murmur of Gilian's voice? He thought it was. It seemed to come from the place where the shoe had clinked.

The murmur ceased, only to be followed by another vague murmur in a distinctly different voice. Buff bethought him that, greatly as he desired to find Gilian, he could not eavesdrop; but—with whom was she talking?

The green demon of jealousy sat upon his shoulder, twirling its tail. That other and personal devil, his conscience, sat up and took notice on the other shoulder.

"Suppose it is the Twisted Foot over yonder?" hinted the personal devil. "It is your duty as a citizen to investigate, and to act accordingly."

"Suppose it isn't?" demurred a third demon—Buff's better nature.

"In that case there would be no harm done," smoothly declared the personal devil. "One must not allow one's finer feelings to conflict with one's manifest duty to the community."

"My colleague has the right of it," declared the green devil. "Your plain duty, my friend, is to march forward in the interests of truth, to strike hard and often, and to abolish this person who is meeting your love by the light of the moon!"

There did not happen to be any moon, but, like the *March Hare*, devils invariably use the best butter.

"If it is somebody else," drawled the third devil, "she won't thank you for the intrusion."

"She won't thank you anyway," slipped in the green demon.

"Better not risk it," counseled the third devil. "This is a delicate matter. My advice is to wait. Everything will eventuate happily."

"You are wrong!" passionately declared that conscientious objector, the casuistical devil. "If it really is the Twisted Foot, and you continue to delay, you will lose the opportunity of a lifetime. Hurry, my dear sir, hurry!"

"Wait! Wait!" agonized the third devil.

Buff waited, a prey to his mixed emotions. While he waited, he heard, from the direction of the house, the sound of flying feet. He could not go forward without running into Gilian and her conversational friend. He could not go back. He crouched where he was, at the edge of the cornfield, hoping painfully that he would not be seen.

The owner of the flying feet fled past him at a distance of about three yards. It was Jemima, running in the direction of the voices. Buff, hot and cold with shame at his predicament, did not dare to budge. Mrs. Fair might be following the girl.

For what seemed an eternity he crouched, with one knee on a pebble that grew sharper and sharper with the lagging flight of time. He moved the knee, lost his balance, threw out a hand to save himself, and clapped it down on a recumbent thistle. His ensuing involuntary movement made some little noise.

"Is that you, Gil?" inquired a voice, in a restrained whisper.

Buff made no reply. He snuggled to the earth, and incidentally to the thistle. The

voice repeated the question. The owner of the voice was Mrs. Fair. She was between him and the house, and was coming toward him.

She passed by him, so close that he could have put forth an arm and touched her shoe. He put forth nothing save a prayer that she would not see him. She apparently did not, and was swallowed up in the darkness that had swallowed Jemima.

The murmurs of voices had ceased. Shoe iron clinked once, twice, and again. Then Buff heard a sudden scramble and a smack. A nervous horse was being mounted. There came the dull, low thumps of trotting hoofs on grass, a distant clink, and a faint thump. Then some one off there in the darkness began to cry. It was a woman.

This was too much. Buff, holding his breath, decided to risk the twins, and crawled like a crab toward the house. He entered the kitchen quite as if nothing had happened, and took up the elmwood dasher. The twins, sitting at the table, their heads touching, were laboriously spelling out the news of the world in a six-weeks-old *Kansas City Star*. They did not look up at his entrance.

Mr. Fair turned his sightless face toward him. There might have been anxiety in the hesitating smile on his lips.

"I thought I heard you go out," he said.

"Sure you did," confirmed Buff. "I left my knife in a saddle pocket, and had to go after it."

Mr. Fair nodded, as if content with the explanation.

"Yeah—I need a screw driver here, and a knife blade is good as any."

Buff, to lend color to his tale, made noisy play with the knife blade on the metal parts of the dasher. A few minutes later he put it back into the churn.

When the three women came in, fifteen minutes later, Buff was sitting beside Mr. Fair. It may have been a guilty conscience, but it seemed to him that all three looked at him keenly as they entered. That their eyes were red was more than seeming—it was a fact. Another angle of the mystery—why should all three have been weeping together?

Later, Gilian, standing looking down at the twins and their newspaper, suddenly turned her back; but she did not turn quickly enough to hide the two tears that ran down her cheeks.

Buff stood up.

"I've got to be going," he said carefully, and reached for his hat.

Mrs. Fair pressed him to stay for the night, and to go in with them to the trial in the morning; but he would not, and departed, after promising to meet them at court. He rode away, his brain in a tumult.

Under the soothing influence of Buster's steady walk-along, he gradually began to think more clearly, but to little purpose. Plan after plan for helping Gilian and solving the mystery of the Twisted Foot he evolved and rejected. Many were discarded because of their obvious impracticability, others because money was needed for their furtherance, and he had no money. When he reached Farewell, he had thought of nothing practical.

As he rode into town, he heard Callo-way's roosters flap their wings and sound their midnight call. He drew out his watch and held the glowing tip of his cigarette over the face. It was ten minutes after midnight. However, three places of business were brightly lit—the Starlight and Happy Heart Saloons, and the Dewdrop Dance Hall.

Three gentlemen, likewise brightly lit, were sitting on the edge of the sidewalk in front of the Happy Heart. With their arms entwined affectionately about each other's necks, and stamping the time with their spurred heels in the dust of the street, they were caroling the cowland ditty of old Sam Clute, which runs in this wise:

"Old Sam Clute was a damned old brute,
And he couldn't get his cattle to the loading chute.
With a hi-yi, and a ki-yi,
And a hi-yi, yippy-yippy-yi!"

"For it's gittin' mighty late, and it's gittin' mighty cold,
And the longhorn cattle are a gittin' mighty old.
With a hi-yi, and a ki-yi,
And a hi-yi, yippy-yippy-yi!"

When the vocalists saw Buff, they hailed him joyously, rushed out into the street, and hauled him from his horse, offering refreshment in three keys. One was his cousin, Bill Holliday, and the other two his friends, Tom Dowling of the Cross-in-a-Box, and the Kid's Twin of the Bar S.

"Good ol' Buffy!" cried his cousin, cleverly jamming Buff's hat over his eyes. "Come have a lil drink!"

"To-morrow," said Buff. "I got business to-night."

"No business done after midnight," declared Tom Dowling with the utmost grav-

ity. "I'll tut-take your hu-horse tut-to the cuc-cuc-cuc-cuc—"

"Flap your wings and you'll get it, ol' rooster," advised the Kid's Twin.

"I ain't a crowin'," denied Tom Dowling indignantly. "I'm a sayin' cuc-cuc-coral. Where's 'at stirrup? Buff's gone and hid stirrup. Nemmine, don't need stirrup."

So saying, he grasped the saddlehorn firmly, and contrived to vault into the saddle, with such success that he fell off on the opposite side. The Kid's Twin celebrated his downfall with shouts and every load in his six-shooter. Bill Holliday must needs emulate him.

Buff would have withdrawn, for he was not amused, had not Tom Dowling, in his efforts to arise, gripped him firmly by the boot tops. Tom, having shinned up Buff's legs to his belt, twisted his fingers in the belt and refused to let go.

"Le's all sing lil song," suggested Tom, in a voice audible at half a mile. "All together now, bub-boys! Make her ring!"

"'Twas in the spring of eighty-three,
Watson Ritch, he hired me;
He says, 'Young feller, I want you to go
And drive this herd to Mexico!'"

Bang, bang, bang, cracked Tom Dowling's six-shooter. It may be that Tom was not as careful in his elevation as he might have been. At any rate, before he and his merry companions had completed the next verse, the sheriff, tucking the tail of his nightshirt into his trousers, descended upon them.

"Look here, boys," said the sheriff in an annoyed tone, "I don't care how much noise you make, or how much powder you burn, but I've got an interest in where your bullets go. Four of 'em just now came through my window, and there's broken glass all over the floor. I like to cut my feet, to say nothin' of gettin' plugged if you'd aimed more to the right. When you shoot, shoot straight up."

"My fuf-fault," Tom Dowling averred penitently. "Nun-next time I'll aim better. I'll shoot to the right, like you sus-said. The drinks are on me. Lil drink, Joe, jus' show nun-no hard feelin'!"

The other two echoed the invitation. They took the sheriff by the arms and propelled him toward the Happy Heart. The sheriff went, not unwillingly; for he was one of the boys, and, with no wife to say him nay, he could take comfort in his liquor.

Buff trailed along with Dowling. He had to. As well shake off a barnacle as the firmly established Mr. Dowling!

Draping his long frame against the bar, Buff found himself between the sheriff and Tom. Bottles and glasses were slid along by that personification of efficiency, the Happy Heart bartender. They drank a round. They drank another round. They drank a third round.

"Cheer up!" cried Tom Dowling, nudging the gloomy Buff with a sharp elbow. "The devil's dead. Have 'nother, ol' race horse!"

Old race horse! It was the term Tom Dowling applied only to those whom he liked very much indeed. It was suddenly borne in upon Buff that his desertion of the cattle fraternity for that of the nesters was making no difference to these three friends of his. They knew, of course. Such news travels fast.

The sheriff turned. It was evident that he must have paid a social call upon his private demijohn before turning in, because the three drinks he had just taken were causing him to take a mighty expansive view of life.

"Race horse," said he, leaning confidentially toward Buff. "Did I hear you say race horse?"

Buff shook his head.

"Tom Dowling said that."

"Tom," said the sheriff, "you got a race horse?"

"I wish I had," was the reply, "then I'd bub-beat that knee-sprung, string-haltin', three-legged hat rack you're always gassin' about!"

"Is that so?" countered the sheriff. "Is that so? Which there ain't a horse in the country can beat that brag horse of mine!"

"Talk's cheap," sneered Dowling.

The sheriff immediately began to produce coin of the realm from every pocket in his pants. Clinking the money on the bar, he stacked it.

"Here!" he shouted. "Here's two hundred dollars says there ain't a horse in the county can beat him any distance up to two miles!"

"If I wasn't broke—" began Dowling.

"Say, Joe, I know a horse can beat yours," interrupted Bill Holliday.

"Whose?" demanded the sheriff.

"My horse Buster—uh—that is, he was mine. I done—uh—sold him to Buff here; but alla same that Buster horse can beat

yours any distance up to two miles the best day he ever lived!"

Buff stared at his cousin, perceiving for the first time that he wore a black eye and a puffed lower lip. He did no more than remark these facial adornments in passing, because his mind was taken up with the wild utterances of his cousin's tongue. Buster was a good, speedy animal, but he was not quite in a class with the horse of whose speed and bottom the sheriff was so inordinately proud.

"How about it, Buff?" exclaimed the sheriff, turning away from Bill. "You want to race?"

"I ain't carin'," Buff said slowly. At that instant there was born in his brain the germ of an idea—an idea that promised better things than any he had tried to think out since leaving the Fair place. "I don't want your money, Joe, but I tell you what I do want, and that's a job."

The sheriff, after some difficulty in focusing, fixed him with a glittering eye.

"A job!" he repeated. "How a job?"

"The second deputy's job is still open, ain't it? Yeah, well, that's the job I want. If my horse wins, I get the job and the regular salary."

"I got somebody else in mind."

"Then the race is off."

But the sheriff's sporting blood was up.

"I'll take a chance. If you lose, you don't get a thin dime. If you win, I appoint you second deputy at the regular salary and mileage."

"Good enough! The race to be run tomorrow morning at—"

"Suh-seven o'clock," Bill Holliday struck in swiftly.

"Too early," objected the sheriff.

"Bub-but if you make it later, I won't see it," explained Bill. "I got a 'portant 'gagement at seven thirty."

"Oh, all right," the sheriff gave in. "Seven o'clock goes, if it suits you, Buff. Good enough! It's a whack. I hope you ain't countin' on that job too hard!"

"Not me," said Buff heartily. "It's a cinch you'll win, sheriff."

"Changin' your tune, huh?" bantered the sheriff. "Beginning to wonder how you're going to eat, I expect!"

"I didn't say so," Buff denied tranquilly.

"I should say he didn't say so!" broke in Bill Holliday, whose mobile features had worn an expression of pleased anticipation

ever since he had made his apparently rash assertion concerning the Buster horse. "I should admire to say not! Buster, he'll run away like your sewing machine was tied. I got a hundred dollars says so."

"Board it," said the sheriff, and immediately began to count out a hundred from the stack in front of him.

"I don't want your money, either," declared Bill. "My hundred against the other deputy's job, Joe—same terms as Buff's bet."

"I don't need three deputies," demurred Joe.

"Changin' *your* tune now, huh?" sneered Bill. "Ain't so sure you're goin' to win, are you? I always knew that horse of yours was a false alarm!"

"You've made a bet!" snapped the goaded sheriff. "A mile, Buff—the usual distance, from the lone pine beyond Piney Jackson's blacksmith shop to Calloway's store."

Buff shook his head. If there was a chance for Buster to win, it lay in the popular distance for grass-fed horses—two furlongs, a quarter of a mile. Buster was of the Steeldust strain, and the stallion Steeldust was one of the best quarter horses that ever looked through a bridle. Buster's best point was in getting away. If Buff could get the jump, perhaps beat the shot a shade, there was a chance for his horse—not an excellent chance, but a chance.

"No, sheriff," said Buff. "Make it a quarter. Buster's been ridden right smart the last couple of days. Here it is one o'clock in the morning, and he outside in the street, when he ought to be in the corral, taking his rest, with three quarts of oats under his ribs. Make it a quarter. Didn't I hear you say your horse was good any distance up to two miles?"

"You said the same thing about Buster," grumbled the sheriff.

"Bill said that," denied Buff. "It's a quarter, Joe, or the bet's off. What's the matter? Ain't yours quick on the jump?"

"It's a quarter and a bet!" exclaimed the sheriff.

So there was another round. When Buff set his glass down and turned to ask his cousin a question, Bill had disappeared.

XVI

THE inhabitants of Farewell, male and female after their kind, were clustered on both sides of the street by ten minutes to

seven o'clock the next morning. The sheriff's horse was the favorite, because it had shown what it could do, while Buster was practically unknown.

Then, too, the sheriff's personal popularity had something to do with the town's feeling. Buff had been well liked in the place, but his taking up with nesters had undoubtedly damaged his standing. Farewell was a cow town, with all that the name implies.

As he rode his horse to the starting point, Buff affected not to notice the unfriendly stares of acquaintances with whom he had once been on a basis of amity. For all that he had expected to be more or less ostracized, the actual experience hurt. He was a friendly soul, and he liked people to like him.

As one with a toothache bites down hard on the offending tooth, Buff checked his horse in front of a party of three—Calloway, the postmaster, Carlson, keeper of the livery stable, and a gambler rejoicing in the felicitous name of Stony Flint. Despite their darkling looks, it was his intention to make them speak to him. Accordingly, he greeted the three cheerfully by name.

Calloway returned the greeting hurriedly, looking anywhere save at Buff. Carlson gave him a grave, noncommittal "good morning." Stony Flint said nothing.

Buff looked straight at the gambler, and repeated his salutation. In the face of this, Stony continued to remain silent; but he could not stare Buff down. Finally his eyes wavered, dropped, and fell.

This was a dangerous mistake. Buff was within easy arm's length of the gambler. The instant that Flint's eyelids lowered, Buff's right arm shot out with the speed of a striking snake, and his long fingers hooked themselves into the man's collar.

The startled Buster side jumped two yards in a flash; but Buff had anticipated this, and had thrown his weight to that side. Stony Flint, jerked off his feet, his face pressed against the harsh leather of Buff's saddle, with Buff's knuckles pushing in his Adam's apple, strangling and wheezing, strove to yank out his gun. Although Buster was sidling all over the street, Buff managed to stay in the saddle, retain his hold of the gambler, and run the barrels of Tresawna's derringer into Flint's right ear.

"Stony," said Buff, "do you want me to wipe you off the census?"

The gambler at once desisted from his frantic efforts to reach his weapon.

"These shoulder holsters ain't always so handy, are they?" went on Buff, in an easy speaking-of-the-weather tone. "You ought to carry a derringer in your vest pocket, the way I do. Then you wouldn't be caught out in the rain thisaway. Stony, I want to ask you two questions. Have you crossed me off your visiting list? If so, why? What's the matter? Cat got your tongue? Speak, damn you, speak!"

But Stony Flint was past speech. He could only guggle. Buff eased up on the throat pressure.

"I'll get you for this!" the gambler snarled thickly.

"Not from where you're standing," countered Buff. "Say 'Howdy,' or—"

Once more he ground the barrels of the derringer into the gambler's ear.

"Ha-howdy," groaned Stony Flint.

"Kind of stuttery," said Buff, "but it will do. I don't want to be hard on you. Take a seat."

So saying, he flung Stony from him with such force that the gambler sat down plump in the middle of the street, the dust puffing up about him in a white cloud.

Released from the extra burden, Buster quieted. Buff, watching the gambler narrowly, sprang the catch of the derringer barrels and broke the gun.

"See, Stony!" he said loudly, for he wanted all the spectators to hear. "See here—the gun ain't loaded. Joke on you, fellah!"

A stifled snicker ran about the crowd. Stony, glaring, his hard face twisted into a mask of diabolical rage, remained where he was for a long minute. Buff's slitted eyes watched him. His right hand had dropped to his side.

Slowly the gambler began to rise to his feet. When he was halfway up, his right hand jerked, and dived under his vest. There followed a flash and a bang, and a bluster of smoke whirled about Buster's head. Stony, shot through the right shoulder, spun half around and fell, his six-shooter dropping from his useless hand.

For a breath he remained quiescent. Then he scrambled up like a toad, and snatched at his weapon with his left hand. Buff instantly drove an accurate bullet through the back of that left hand.

This was the end. Stony Flint collapsed in a writhing huddle—for there are few in-

juries quite so exquisitely painful as a wound through the hand. Friends came out and carried him away. One stooped to pick up the gambler's six-shooter, but stopped and eyed Buff apprehensively.

"Take it away," said Buff kindly. "You're more than welcome."

Buff spurred Buster to where the sheriff stood, near the starting point.

"Even break, Joe," he said clearly. "He went after his gun first."

"Sure did—I seen him," chipped in Bill Holliday.

"We all did," said Tom Dowling and the Kid's Twin together.

"I saw it myself," averred the sheriff testily. "It's all right. You ain't going to race in that saddle, are you?"

"Sure not," replied Buff, and forthwith dismounted.

Unsaddling, Buff looked over Buster's back at the sheriff's horse. It seemed to him that the animal looked a trifle fat, not to say bloated. Tom Dowling evidently held the same view.

"Got a leetle mite of a grass belly on him, ain't he, Joe?" observed Tom.

"No—oh, no," denied the sheriff. "He ain't been turned out since spring."

The sheriff elected to ride in his socks, Buff in his boots and spurs. Buster, at the barrier—a line drawn in the dust with a neck yoke—fiddled a bit. The crowd, although most of it was grouped at the finish, annoyed him. The sheriff's horse stood like a cow, his head down, his small forefeet close together. The sheriff chuckled him into his bridle with a pull at the bit; but he neither pricked his ears nor showed spirit. To Buff, he looked logy.

"Ready, boys?" asked Mike Flynn, the peg-legged owner of the Blue Pigeon Store.

"Ready!" replied the sheriff.

"All set!" said Buff.

Mike raised his six-shooter and pulled the trigger. *Bang!* Buff rammed home the spurs. Buster bounded forward in a deer leap, laid his belly to the ground, and flew.

In that first jump Buff heard at his side an unmistakable squelching sound—the sound a horse's stomach makes when he is galloped with a belly full of water.

Buff, his spurs well home, plying his quirt like a Mexican, took time to doubt the sheriff's sanity. Filling a horse with water was certainly no way to prepare for a race.

Buster had got the jump on the other

horse. In his first leap he had put the racer's white nose level with his own tail. Not till the furlong did the white nose begin to creep up, and then the gaining stopped at Buster's loins.

What though the sheriff yelled encouragement and poured the leather into his horse's flank, the animal gained not another inch. Indeed, when Buster shot over the finish line like a streak of wind-swept scud, the sheriff's horse was daylighted by a good yard.

Buff pulled up and rode back. The sheriff had already dismounted behind the line. He was looking his mount over with eyes in which disgust and surprise were mixed in equal proportions.

"I don't understand it," he was saying to the world at large. "I never knew him to take more than a sip before eight o'clock, or till he's warmed up, and here this morning he's drunk his belly so full he can hardly wiggle!"

"Sure sounded like a water barrel, Joe," said Alicran Skeel, manager of the Hogpen outfit, who had bet on Buster.

"That's what comes of not watchin' over a horse before a race," grumbled Bill Lainey, the fat hotel keeper, who had bet on the sheriff's horse. "If it hadn't been for that water—"

"You wouldn't have lost your two bits," inserted the sheriff swiftly.

"It was five dollars!" Bill Lainey cried indignantly.

"Nemmine, Bill," said Buff. "You can double the prices of your meals and get it all back in a day. Charge it up to the ultimate consumer."

"I dunno," said Bill doubtfully. "Nobody by that name ever ate in my hotel."

Under cover of the laugh that followed, the sheriff went up to Buff.

"You won your bets, you and Bill," said he with good grace. "Come down to the office at nine o'clock, and I'll swear you both in."

When Buff returned to the starting point, his cousin had disappeared. Neither Tom Dowling nor the Kid's Twin knew where Holliday had gone, or what was the nature of his engagement.

When he had seen to the baiting of Buster, Buff went in search of his cousin. After an hour's poking about in both likely and unlikely places, he heard Bill's voice raised in song. He walked down the voice, and

located it as proceeding from a cluster of a dozen cottonwoods growing around a small seep in a draw a quarter mile directly in rear of the stage company's corral. Beneath the largest cottonwood he found Bill Holliday comfortably enthroned on an ancient whisky keg. He was alternately drinking from a bottle and singing a verse of a song.

"What you doing here?" demanded Buff.

"Keeping 'portant 'gagement," replied his cousin.

"What you mean?"

With a look of patient weariness, Bill Holliday set the bottle on his knee.

"Mum-member I told the sheriff I had a 'portant 'gagement at seven thirty? This is it." He waved the bottle, and laid a cunning finger alongside his nose. "Tut-told ol' sheriff truth, I did. Habit o' mine, tellin' truth. I'm George B. Washington. Yeah, had to make 'portant 'gagement early, so sheriff have to race soon as possible after horse drunk!"

A great light broke upon Buff.

"Why?" he asked, beginning to grin.

"You ashk mum-me why? Horse drunkard, tha'sh why. Curse of drink ruin many good man—good horse, I mean."

"But what made the horse so thirsty?" persisted Buff.

"Salt," replied the jovial soul on the whisky keg. "Lul-lots of salt. I bub-been stuffin' it down his neck all night in cuc-cuc-coral. Helluva time rope him in dark. He bit me twice, but I done it, y'betcha! Now you got job, I got job, we all got job. Have lil drink?"

Buff declined.

"Whu-why did I want job?" continued Holliday. "I tell you whu-why. You see this black eye? I traded Sus-sam Cuc-caltrop two black eyes for it. You see this cut lip? I give Sus-sam bloody nose and knocked out tut-two teeth for it. I sure made Sam sick! Why? I tell you why. Because he cuc-called you a nester. Ain't nobody but me 'lowed cuc-call you nester, and I tol' him so. He got mad. Then Rum cuc-come in after we were all through, and Sam was unconscious, and you never saw a more unreasonable man. I had to work him over with my six-shooter before he'd quit pup-pesterin' me. Have a lil drink? Nun-no? Then I will."

So saying, Bill tilted the neck of the bottle into his mouth.

(To be continued in the April number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Shadow Hands

A STORY THAT RAISES ONCE MORE AN OLD, OLD QUESTION

By Genevieve Neergaard

"POPPYCOCK!" I exclaimed unconsciously, as I tossed aside the magazine I had been reading and sauntered over to the wide window.

It was curtained in a sliding, silver fringe of rain, which dripped monotonously from the stone sill to the flattened grass below. In the gathering grayness the vines clinging to the old walls tapped with ghostly fingers on the drenched glass. It was an eerie sound. With a shiver of distaste, I drew the velvet draperies close and shut out the dusk.

Sidney Murchison, deep in a leather chair before the fire, lowered his paper, letting his eyeglasses fall on their narrow ribbon, and shot a quizzical gleam at me from under raised brows.

"What's poppycock?" he asked.

"Why, all this furor about spiritualism. It's a result of the war, I suppose. Natural enough—thousands swept into the hereafter, thousands hungry for some word of consolation left behind—but it seems so pitiful, so futile, all their groping. The dead are dead, and that's the end of it, as far as we're concerned—or they, either, I fancy."

Murchison turned his cigar reflectively.

"I wonder!" he mused. "I wonder! You, for instance, or myself—there are things we care about here, things that are intensely vital to us. Somehow I doubt if the mere final closing of our eyes will dissolve that interest. I imagine there will be the urge, with our broader vision, to come back and set things right, to tie up loose ends. I believe our individualities remain intact. In time, of course, we shall grow beyond the preoccupations that engage us here, just as in life we outgrow a phase; but save through voluntary indifference we shall never grow beyond the power to widen and deepen the lives of those we have loved and left."

We were alone in the club library, in that vacant time that precedes the dinner hour, shut away from the tearful dusk by the lamp-lit warmth of the drawn red curtains and the friendly brown backs of books. Lean, faultlessly tailored, his close-cropped, grizzled head tipped back, my companion sat with half closed eyes, apparently deep in reverie. He was a lawyer of no mean fame, and, as such, had known no end of vastly interesting experiences. Evidently he was browsing in his rich storehouse of memories.

A log sent out a little hissing spurt of flame, and Murchison came back with a start.

"Why, man, I've seen it happen! I have seen the dead reach out to right a wrong—reach out with shadow hands across the years."

My interest keened.

"Tell me," I suggested.

"I believe I will, Andrews. Those who might be harmed in the telling are dust."

He leaned back and crossed his long legs before him.

"When I was a lad at Columbia," he began, "I roomed, in my senior year, with a chap named Stanley Warburton. An odd, lonely boy he was, shy, and somehow, without being in the least gloomy, giving an impression of tragedy. I never could quite make him out until, yielding at last to his persuasions, I went home with him after commencement for a visit, and met his father, Peter Warburton, for the first time. Then I understood, for the vague air of sadness that enveloped Stanley was intensified a hundredfold in his father. He was a gray and silent man of perhaps fifty-five, though his melancholy bearing made him seem older. Tall, a trifle stooped, with hawklike nose and pale gray eyes set deep in bony caverns, he had an air of detachment. Even then I had the feeling that

here was a man companioned by grief and indifferent to all living things.

"His very dress was of the past—a high, black stock above a finely ruffled shirt, his blue-white hair lying a little long about his ears. He greeted us with a stilted formality that seemed odd from a father to his son. His punctilious, courteous phrases, falling from lips that slashed through his pallor like a scar, chilled me, in spite of Stanley's apparent obliviousness to his coldness. I felt that I wanted to get away from the depression of his presence, and I knew a deep sympathy for the boy whose life had been laid in this stern man's hands. My roommate had been reared in the shadow of sorrow—small wonder, then, that even in the boisterous contact with his kind he was lonely and unconsciously a bit aloof.

"I think I never shall forget that visit. The house itself was a gem. Pure Colonial in architecture, it gleamed against dark trees and flung its white arms wide to the tangled old garden that straggled down to the sea. There was an air of the plenty and affluence of a bygone generation about it, with its lovely old mahogany, its quaintly patterned wallpapers, and its heavy candlesticks scintillant with prisms. It had rare beauty and dignity, but somehow—it was dead. Do you remember the tale of the enchanted castle whose inmates were sunk in an endless sleep by some witch's spell? Well, it was like that. There was an overwhelming sense of somberness about the place, as if nothing lived there but sorrow, nothing walked through its wide halls but memories. The trees that arched above it, filtering the light through living green, added to its gloom. It was like being under water in that strange, glaucous dimness, like dwelling in the heart of some drowned ship."

Murchison's eyes seemed fixed on something very far away, and the expression in their depths stirred a cold feeling in my mind.

"Then there were the sounds of the place, too," he went on. "There was always the whispering sibilance of the sea, with a deeper undertone where the waves broke in a cave half a mile up the shore. It throbbed like a heart, that steady undertone, and sometimes, when the wind went wailing over the cliffs, it seemed like a heart about to break, so wild, so irregular was its beating. The sea, the tawny cliffs, the gray gulls wheeling, the forgotten gar-

den, the scents of salt and lavender—how it all comes back to me!

"There was a half moon of white beach at the foot of the slope, where the garden path was lost in a smother of dune grass. Stanley and I marked this spot for our own. There would be great bathing in the curling surf, and warm basking on the shining sand—but we reckoned without Peter Warburton. He hated the sea, and unconditionally forbade Stanley to swim in it. There was a hot argument behind the closed doors of the study, but the upshot of it was that we were tethered to the strip of beach as surely as if we were on leading strings. Stanley had given his word.

"'It's because of my mother that he hates it so,' he told me. 'She was drowned when I was a baby.'

"Then came the day of the storm. The sulphureous sky was like a great tent drawn down over a restless sea, and the wind went mad. All day it lashed the vines like whips against the window panes, and slapped the shutters dolefully. Toward sunset I went for a walk along the cliff that rose to the north of the place, where the trees walled the garden with a dark and swaying mass rising tier on tier to the summit, black against the jaundiced sky. At the very edge of the height stood Peter Warburton, his long cape whipped about his lean, stooped form, his white, uncovered hair blown back. His head was thrown high, his arms were uplifted in an attitude of anathema, and as I watched him the wind caught his voice and flung it across the cliff to me. He was cursing the sea.

"Mad? Of course he must have been a little mad, but then it seemed to me a magnificently romantic thing, the more so for the mystery that cloaked it. As I look back, I can see that from the first there must have been some lack of balance in the man, some colossal egotism that warped his vision and made him unable to accept life as it came to him. Other men are bereaved, and still they carry on.

"It was a strange week that I spent in that house. It was strangest of all when, with my grips waiting in the carriage outside, I went with Stanley to his father's study, to bid Peter Warburton good-by. This was the first time I had seen the room, and I felt a lively curiosity about it. Would it tell anything of the peculiar personality that it sheltered through long hours of each day?

"Stanley knocked. There came no responsive sound, except a minute grating, such as a child might make with a pencil too tightly gripped in inexpert fingers. He turned the knob, and it yielded. The door swung back on a long, narrow, high-ceiled chamber, wavering with shadows and dim with age. There were windows that reached to the floor, but, because of the green glow from the trees without, the atmosphere was washed with a livid light, in which Peter Warburton sat at an old satin-wood desk, absorbed in a sheet of paper that lay upon it. One thin hand rested on a queer little heart-shaped table, which traveled on tiny wheels over the outspread paper, while a pencil held upright in the thing sketched furious circles. The floor at his side was littered with crumpled sheets covered with the same design. As we entered, he held up his free hand in monition, and bent intent eyes on the vibrating board. Faster and faster it flew, in ever widening circles, and then, all at once, it was still. His hand dropped from it.

"I cannot—it eludes me," he sighed, and shook himself awake.

He turned to me, with his air of formality drawn about him like a cloak.

"I trust you will pardon me," he said, and then to Stanley, who had gone white there in the dimness: "Last night I could have sworn there were words on the paper, but in the light they turned to nothing!"

"You see, the man was evidently unhinged. I followed the unconscious direction of his gaze, and barely stifled a gasp. Above a mantel of carved onyx hung a portrait so vivid, so intensely vital, that I felt an uncanny chill ripple my spine. The picture was like a swift, clear flood of brilliance in a dark and ghostly wood. A girl with hair like a wind-blown flame, and a skin of cream and amber, stood against a background of cobalt sea, as if poised for instant flight. There was about her an evanescent, haunting quality that was profoundly stirring. Spellbound by her beauty, I could think of nothing but an imprisoned flare stilled to a fine white line. There was that in her shadowy gold-brown eyes that caught at your heart like a hand—wistfulness and a hint of tears; yet on her brow, and in the tender curves of her pictured mouth, there was an ineffable peace. Oh, it lived, that portrait, and spoke of many things, though it was not for years that I was to read its message.

"I took my leave of Peter Warburton. Outside the door I turned to Stanley with a question on my lips.

"My mother," he said simply. "That was done the year she died."

"But this was a girl," I protested. "Why, she looked not a day more than eighteen!"

"Just eighteen. You see, she was only sixteen when my father married her. He was thirty-five. I've often wondered how she matched her lilt to his somber tones. Perhaps she never did, for she only lived two years. He worshiped her, though. You see how it is with him. It's not surprising, when you look at her."

"It really wasn't, I thought, for a lovelier face I had never seen—then.

"I started West that night, and with me I carried the memory of that girl looking down from the tarnished gold of her frame like a little white saint in a shrine.

"I never saw Stanley Warburton again. There were the usual frequent letters at first, dropping in time to a comfortable infrequency; then one day came the announcement of his marriage to a girl whom I did not know. I sent a gift, and, except for an occasional feeling of gladness that now he would be lonely no longer, I more or less forgot him. A year later a daughter was born to them, and they named her Natalie, after the lovely girl of the portrait. Some five years later I was shocked to read the names of Stanley and his wife in the fatality list of a horrible railroad wreck.

"I wondered about the child. Would hers be another loveless, lonely life? It seemed tragic. I wrote Peter Warburton a letter of sympathy, and inquired for her. A few months later, when business interests took me East, I called on him. He had settled little Natalie with her governess in his silent old house, and as she stood beside her grandfather's chair, a blithe, vivid child, I wondered if she might not humanize him just a little, if she might not waken some responsive chord. Apparently she did just that, for several times in the years that followed I looked in on them, and each time I found Natalie grown lovelier, while her grandfather seemed to have warmed and mellowed curiously."

II

MURCHISON tossed the stub of his cigar into the fire, then settled back and arched his long fingers thoughtfully.

"Queer thing that, about an old dog and new tricks! It's true, you know—true as life; yet this, apparently, was the exception that proved the rule, for here was old Peter Warburton, seventy if he was a day, remade by a child's soft hands. All his harshness swept away, he seemed to have taken on a new guise. Even the house had a brighter look. Some of the trees around the living room wing had been cleared away, and now the sun warmed the old mahogany and frolicked colorfully with the pendent prisms of the ancient candlesticks.

"I recall that on one of my infrequent visits I found the house full of young people, Natalie was celebrating her sixteenth birthday—a party given her by her grandfather—a truly magnificent gesture from him! There was a clean-cut young chap who followed her about adoringly. Evidently he was deeply in love with the girl, and her grandfather appeared well satisfied to have it so.

"'Young Dick Van Ness,' he told me, and beamed on them from across the room. 'Of course, Sidney, she's only a child now, but there is time—aye, there is time! The lad's the very one I would have chosen for her myself. That boy's grandfather was my best friend. A sea captain, was Arnold Van Ness, and a whiter, truer man never drew breath. The sea took him. By God, the sea has had its way with me and those I loved!'

"Old Peter blew a mighty blast on his silk handkerchief, and wiped his pale eyes, unashamed. I left him, wondering just how deep that softening process had reached, and remembering how I had seen him tense in the green gloom, with eyes strained desperately to the swift circling of a little heart-shaped board.

"In the two years that passed before I turned my face again to the East, little Natalie had blossomed incredibly. She was the portrait come to life. Wistful, with great haunting eyes, all cream and amber under the flame of her hair, she was as lovely as a dream. No wonder old Peter's eyes warmed as he heard her singing about the house, or watched her with her bright head bent above a heap of lacy mystery, while the quaint jewel on her left hand winked knowingly. There were great preparations afoot. Young Dick, with his joyous laugh, was ecstatically at the girl's side a good part of the time. I think I have never seen two who so completely belonged. The

gleam of her spirit and his steadiness of purpose, the shadow that lay in her eyes and the sunshine that brightened his smile, her wealth of tenderness and the clean young vigor of his passion—once in a lifetime you find a balance as perfect. The wedding was to be in a week, and Peter Warburton insisted upon my remaining. Natalie, too, seemed genuinely to want me, so I stayed."

Sidney Murchison paused to clip the end from one of his ubiquitous Havanas. As I held the match for him to light it, I noted that his hand shook just a little.

"Yes, I stayed," he continued. "I like to believe that my presence there was a help to Natalie in the black time that followed. It was two days before the wedding that old Peter, leaning heavily on his cane by the door at the foot of the attic stairs, turned the key in its time-stiffened lock, and, with Natalie at his elbow, hobbled up the steep steps in search of the veil he had promised she should wear—her grandmother's wedding veil.

"It was a queer, overcast sort of a day. A portentous shadow wavered about the old house, and the wind moaned faintly somewhere out over the cliffs. Even old Peter's dog, a huge great Dane, was restless, though usually he was a placid brute, lying long hours beside his master's chair, motionless save for the shifting of his little red-rimmed eyes. I remember that the sky looked like beaten brass, and the sea, turbulent under its livid bowl, sent back weird, opalescent gleams.

"I could hear the tapping of the old man's cane on the stairs as those two went on their tender quest, and I could picture the eager face of the girl upturned like a flower to her grandfather's deep-furrowed visage. I knew that the attic was a sacred place to Peter Warburton. Stanley had told me of an occasion in his boyhood when he had ventured to explore it. Along with the recollection of the faded silken finery and quaint carved chests he had found there, he had carried the stinging reminder of the only physical punishment his father ever had administered to him. I knew, too, that old Peter had never crossed its threshold since he had caused his dead wife's belongings to be placed there, and that nothing short of his love for Natalie could have drawn him to that dim shrine.

"The room which had been assigned to me was on the second floor, directly oppo-

site the door that led to the attic, so that I could hear the voices of those two above me—the deep tones of the old man, with Natalie's lilting cadence lifted in little questioning notes through his level resonance. An hour later Natalie came down the narrow stairs with a flat, silk-covered box across her outstretched arms. She saw me there at my desk, and came to my side. Her eyes were like drenched pansies, and her mouth was tremulously tender.

"Look at this, Uncle Sidney! Isn't it exquisite?"

"She lifted the quaint glass cover, circled with an almost obliterated wreath of painted orange blooms, and held up a corner of the veil, filmy as a spider's web. A ghost of fragrance breathed from its tenuous folds—a subtle hint of sandalwood, and, faint as a remembered dream, the clean, simple scent of lavender.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said.

"Her face was rapt, and her voice held a little tremor, as of tears.

"It is indeed as lovely as the bride it will adorn; but, dear girl, brides mustn't weep. Leave all that till later," I told her.

"She sank on the hassock before my fireplace, and cupped her little square chin in the hollow of her hand. The firelight glinted in those gold-brown eyes of hers as she spoke.

"I know, but I—I feel so sad! I didn't know about my grandmother before. I've always believed that she just died, as people do, you know—even very young people. Why, she was just my age when it happened! Oh, it must have been terrible! You see there had been a dreadful storm all day, and she was afraid of storms. Grandfather tried to laugh her fears away, but she just sat with her baby across her knees and stared out into the lashing trees, and would not move or speak. When night came, and the wind grew wilder, grandfather gave her a powder to quiet her; and after a time she fell into a troubled sleep, sobbing a little as she slept. All through the night the noise of the wind and the sea pounded about the house, and once or twice my grandmother called out sharply; but when grandfather laid his hand on hers, she was sleeping, so at last he dozed. And then she must have walked in her sleep, as she sometimes did, right out into the storm and down the slope to the sea, or perhaps she was swept from the cliffs by the wind. They never knew just how it happened,

but it was three days before they found her washed into that cave where the sea pounds so, and all that time the little lonely baby that was to be my father cried and cried, and grandfather nearly went mad. Oh, I felt as if I could see her, all white and limp and—and trailing her shroud of kelp, when he told me about it up there in the attic. And then there is a very strange thing—you know Dick's grandfather was a sea captain, and his ship went down the very night my grandmother was drowned. Of course, it was in the China Sea, and it was days before the news reached his home; but it was terribly sad for grandfather to lose the two he cared the most about, wasn't it? I wonder—"

"Her voice sank to sudden silence as we heard the sound of old Peter's cane on the stair. She flew to aid him, but he waved her back, and she turned a startled face as the old man gained the hall and stood for a moment, gasping, against the wall. The great Dane rose from his post by the lower staircase and lumbered to his master's side, but Peter Warburton lifted his stick and brought it down savagely on the big dog's back. Natalie cried out in amazement. The dog gave a weird little shuddering moan and shrank away, turning his red-rimmed eyes to watch the old man's progress down the next flight of stairs to his study. We heard the sharp slam of the study door, and the grating of the unaccustomed bolt.

"Then Natalie lifted her white, frightened face to me. She was trembling like a wind-rippled reed, and I put my arm about her to steady her. I could well understand her agitation, for in that brief glimpse I had had of her grandfather's face, I felt that I had gazed on a naked horror. There was something terrible beyond all words in that livid mask of fury, wherein pale eyes blazed white-hot hatred. His mouth, which slashed through his pallor like a scar, was twisted hideously. There was something terrible, too, in the aged and clawlike hand that clutched what appeared to be a packet of papers against the heavy brocade of his dressing gown—clutched it with a grasp that shook until the paper whispered faintly."

III

THE wind dashed the rain in great, furious gusts on the red-curtained windows, and far back in the deep throat of the fire-

place a voice moaned constantly. I leaned forward to the brass-bound wood box that stands on the library hearth, and laid another log on the embers. I felt cold. Sidney Murchison passed a lean hand across his eyes, with the gesture of one who dispels a black vision.

"Andrews," he mused, "did you ever stop to think of the infinite havoc that attends the shattering of an ideal, the rending of a faith? There was this man, for many years cut off from all the world by his habit of sorrow, his heart hedged round by tragic memories, his only loves on earth the little Natalie and the boy she was to marry—and then a few strokes of an old quill pen sent his world of illusions tumbling down around his stern old head. A few strokes of an old quill pen—and all the time, if he had only known, the antidote for the poison of those words lay, like the tracery of some faint-hearted spider, on countless yellowed pages beneath the web of Natalie's wedding veil.

"But he did not know—and so the day dragged into evening, and still the old man stayed behind the locked door of his study. We could hear the tap of his stick at intervals, and we knew that he must be pacing restlessly; but when Natalie leaned her shining head against the door, and called to him, he would not answer. Even Martin, who had grown gray in his service, could not gain access to that room. Night passed on leaden feet, and the pale morning sunshine was no more wan than Natalie when at last Peter Warburton threw back his study door and called her to him. In a short time she came to my room, with eyes ablaze through a mist of tears.

"He wants you, Uncle Sidney. He has gone mad, I think. He wants to break my life into little pieces, but I won't let him—do you hear? I won't let him!"

"Her voice broke, and she flung out a shaking hand.

"Look!" she cried. There was an angry mark across its slender whiteness, and the betrothal ring was gone. "He took it off when I refused to give it to him. He held me tight and tore it away from me!"

"I left her with a word of reassurance, and hurried to the study, where the old man sat gripping his cane with hands that showed white at the knuckles. He sat very straight and high in his fireside chair, but his blue old lips mumbled and wreathed continuously. The dog had evidently en-

tered the room with Natalie, for now it crouched by his side, with sagging, slaving jowls, and watchful little red eyes under the relaxed folds of its forehead. The thin sunlight filtered down through the trees that still pressed close about the study wing, and wavered across the cold room to touch with watery brightness the portrait, where it hung above the dead, gray ashes of the hearth. I started in horror as my eyes fell on its former loveliness, for now the canvas hung in jagged ribbons.

"Peter Warburton turned a ravaged face to me.

"My boy, I need your professional services," he said, and his voice was as flat as a flail.

"It was as if something had gone out of the man, as if a beloved and shining thing had crumpled to hideousness at his feet. He motioned me to a chair.

"It is a matter of a will," he told me, and fixed his cold, pale eyes on mine so that the words I would have uttered froze on my lips, and I nodded silently. "Get paper from my desk and write," he commanded shortly. "I, Peter Warburton, being of sound mind, do hereby give and bequeath all of which I die possessed to the girl known as Natalie Warburton, upon the condition that she never marries—"

"But, Mr. Warburton, her engagement! Why, to-morrow will be her wedding day!"

"You are in error. There will be no wedding day for her!"

"But young Van Ness—" I broke in, aghast.

"That name may not be mentioned here!"

"His words rasped through the quiet room. The big dog stirred uneasily at the sound. I sat with pen poised above the sheet of foolscap, while conjectures ran through my mind like squirrels in a wheel. I seemed to hear again Natalie's broken words, to see the bruised white hand she held before me, and I knew that never, while her spirit burned high and clear as a flame, would this old man's word come between her and the fulfillment of her destiny.

"Aye, but there is a way to enforce righteousness." It was as if he had read my thoughts. "Her strain must be stamped out!"

"Mr. Warburton, you are mad," I began, but he cut in coldly.

"Not mad, my boy—not that, but sane

at last! After almost half a century of delirium, sane at last! Read this!

"From the pocket of his dressing gown he took a letter. It was faded and torn, yet as my eyes traversed its surface I drew back before the fire of those written words, and from the import of the signature sprawling boldly across the foot of the page—'Thine through all eternity, Arnold.'

"The old man sat with bowed head and brooding eyes.

"And that was my friend,' he said at last. 'My friend—and the woman I worshiped as one would worship a saint! When she went, the world went black to me; but I can see it all now. It was a judgment—the hand of God laid on them both in wrath; and now into my hand is delivered the power to see that her seed shall perish from the earth! Write. If the girl known as Natalie Warburton should see fit to disobey my command, the bodies of her father and of the woman who bore him shall be exhumed from the Warburton burial vault, and their names publicly stricken from the family records.'

"Not your son!' I cried. 'Surely not—'

"My son?' His blue lips lifted hideously. 'Now read to me what you have written.'

"I went sick with a sudden lust to tear the thing across and crush it down the old man's throat. I give you my word that I've never been so close to murder. My fingers ached to close on that corded neck. I raised my head and found those pale eyes, keen and cold as sword blades, fixed on mine. No grip of iron bands could have held me tighter. I picked up the paper.

"Then, as I read that blasphemous will, I swear something came into that room. The heavy damask curtains did not stir, and there was no sound, except for the hollow pulse of the sea; but all at once the very air was tense and pregnant with portent. The great Dane, crouched by his master's chair, raised his huge head and rumbled low in his throat. Old Peter struck out blindly with his cane, and the dog dropped his muzzle on paws that twitched, while the hackles rose uneasily on his spine.

"Won't you reconsider?' I pleaded. 'This document is only so much paper now—let me burn it. Signed and sealed, it becomes an instrument of harm to those you love.'

"Those I love be damned!' he snarled. 'I'll be obeyed! Do you think I'll let that woman's blood pass into another generation, any more than I would let her face desecrate my house?'

"He pointed a bony finger at the portrait, where it hung in tatters against the wall, and seemed to sway slightly, though no breeze stirred in the room.

"Now ring for Martin,' he ordered. 'The man's a fool, but he'll do to witness a paper, eh?'

"I paused with my hand on the velvet bell pull.

"I do this reluctantly, Mr. Warburton. It is an act of tyrannical injustice.'

"Injustice?' He threw back his head and cackled in satirical mirth. 'A lawyer to prate of justice? Now look you—the thing that I decree is justice for me and mine! Ring!'

"Until that moment I had hoped that he would not go through with this cruel vengeance, that he would at least relent and save the happiness of the two young people whom this will would crush. With one swift glance I measured him—the frowning brows drawn down over leaden eyes, the thin sneer of his mouth, the hands that opened and shut with a little dry, rustling sound around the gold head of his cane. No quarter there! I pulled the wine-colored cord, and Martin came, soft-footed, into the room.

"You rang sir?'

"Take these keys and fetch me my portfolio. Then be ready to witness this document.'

"The servant unlocked a lacquered chest that stood against the wall, and took out a worn leather case. He placed it across his master's knees. I spread the will upon it, and offered him my pen.

"I'll not use that damned contraption! Martin, bring me the ink and my own steel pen.'

"Martin crossed to the old satinwood desk. As he lifted the great bronze inkwell, it slipped from his hand and spread a swift black stain across the floor. Peter Warburton struggled to his feet with an imprecation, and the veins sprang out in fury on his temples. The servant's eyes showed white rims of terror—a fear that seemed to me out of all proportion to the offense. His voice broke queerly through his trembling lips.

"I vow, sir, I could not help it! It—

it felt like some one *pushed* it from my hand, sir!

"A likely tale! Bah! Don't stand there like a fish! I'll take your pen, Sidney—or no! Wait!" His eyes narrowed to pale slits, and he caressed his lean jaw in a dry, hard hand. "Martin," he said at last, "go you to the attic, and in the rose-wood desk against the south wall you will find an old quill pen. There is ink there, too, though it may have dried up. However, fetch it, and we shall see." He shook horribly with noiseless laughter. "Poetic justice, eh, my boy? All the pretty words that pen has written, and they are gone—down to the sea in a ship, perhaps; but gone, at any rate. And now that same pen will lay my name across this page and change two human destinies! Do you think she can see what her wantonness has brought? I used to believe—"

"His voice broke off abruptly, and he turned a mask of composure to Martin as the servant entered with a long, speckled quill and a little brown wooden inkpot.

"The room seemed suddenly very stale and dank, and faintly murmurous with an unseen presence. I shivered as Martin gave the pen into the old man's hand, and uncorked the inkpot. The huge dog lumbered to his feet and stood stiff-legged, with those wicked little red eyes of his fixed on empty air. I tell you I felt my hair prickle at its roots. Then he pointed his gray muzzle straight up and howled. The sound rose and swelled in clamorous dissonance, then died away till all the atmosphere was vibrant as with the muffled clangor of a slowly tolling bell, while the dog lay down again and laid his huge, wrinkled head on old Peter's feet.

"The old man's fingers closed convulsively on the will, which lay spread out before him. It crackled crisply in his grasp, and, all unbidden, the memory of another day came to me. Once more I saw this man waiting, hungry-hearted, tense, above a swiftly circling board for words that in the daylight turned to nothing.

"The paper crackled like brown leaves burning, and Peter Warburton dipped his quill into the ink.

"My purpose shall be carried out," he muttered.

"For a moment, as he held the pen poised in his thin hand, blue-veined, infinitely aged, there was no sound save the measured ticking of the tall clock. An odd

mist crept in from somewhere, like a pale, sea-scented wraith, veiling the watery sunlight, bringing on frail wings a peculiar, stifling vapor that seemed to press close about us, like a damp and clinging garment. Old Peter lowered his hand to the paper, and I caught my breath with a poignant feeling of defeat. Then, suddenly, he straightened with a little, choking cry. His fingers tightened on the quill until it bent in his hand, and twitched in a brief spasm across the page. Then the white head went limp on his plum-colored breast, the quill sagged from his hand with a tiny scratching sound, and the big gray dog got slowly to his feet and went out through the open door."

There fell a silence as tangible as a hand laid upon us. For its brief space even the wind seemed to hold its breath. Murchison leaned forward, his elbows on his knees and his long hands loosely clasped before him, and stared into the flames.

"Well, picture to yourself that moment," he went on. "There were the old servant and I alone in the room with all that was left of Peter Warburton. Martin was tearing at the neckcloth beneath the brocade robe, and chafing in futile hope the fast whitening hand that hung limply down. I gave him my aid, but all the time I was conscious of but one thought—Natalie.

"The will lay spread out upon the dead man's knees, with the quill across the paper, just as his falling hand had dropped it. Even as we laid the portfolio on the table, and lifted old Peter to the sofa, I could see a blur of lilac beneath the black of my own writing. So then he had, in that last desperate struggle, signed the name that would give it the power to wreck two lives! There could be no doubt as to Natalie's obedience. It was the fair name of the dead against the happiness of the living, and I knew the answer to that.

"I knew, too, even then, that the accusation was false. I knew it as well as if I had already seen the diary that we later found under the wedding veil. It was a little limp leather book, through whose yellowed pages ran the tear-stained tale of the first Natalie's love for Arnold Van Ness—a love that was denied, that it might not bring sorrow to another. I was shaken by the warring forces within me. My heart did battle with my conscience, my years of professional training, my sense of all that was ethical and honorable in a man of the

law—and even before I sent Martin out of the room to summon Natalie, my heart had triumphed.

"As the door swung shut behind him, I sprang to the table and closed my fingers on the will with a thrill of purpose. I swept it with a quick glance, and felt my skin creep on my body, while my mouth went dry as pith. Circles—nothing more! Cir-

cles sweeping entwined across the page, futile, meaningless!

"Well, the need was gone, but I tore the thing in two at the sound of Natalie's running footsteps on the stair. As I held a match to it, and watched it curl and shrivel to a pallid ash, I wondered if old Peter knew, in that last moment, that *her* hand had lain close on his."

Belated Rewards

HOW PHILIP ADAMS DEMONSTRATED THAT HIS LIFE HAD NOT BEEN A TOTAL FAILURE

By Charles Belmont Davis

PHILIP ADAMS was endowed with nearly all of those gifts which other young men envy, and which are beloved by all women, young or old. His parents were responsible for his good looks, for a distinguished social position, and for an education that was as sound as it was varied. His good manners, his kindly heart, and the charm that gave him a real and most interesting personality, were largely of his own making.

In sporting parlance, had it not been for one drawback, Philip would have started the race of life as an odds-on favorite. The drawback was his lack of any considerable amount of inherited or acquired wealth. His financial assets consisted of a ten-thousand-dollar heritage left him by his father and the modest weekly stipend he drew from the fashionable architect in whose office he was employed.

Most young men whose friends were as universally rich as were those of young Adams would probably have made serious inroads on their patrimony, but not so with Philip. In spite of the temptations with which his good looks and his popularity surrounded him, he managed, without any difficulty whatever, to maintain a single-track mind and an extremely modest standard of living. Every Monday morning he returned from some gorgeous home in the country where he had spent the week-end,

and, unruffled and content, settled down to his very simple bedroom and bath.

It was not that Philip did not care for the luxuries of life, or was at all lacking in sporting spirit—even in the gambling spirit. Wall Street tempted him greatly. Since leaving college, he had refused several flattering offers of positions in the offices of his numerous broker friends.

The trouble with Philip, and what prevented him from following his natural business inclinations, was the fact that he was honestly and sincerely in love. In shaping his career, he believed that he should establish himself in a sure and sound profession, rather than tempt the precarious fortunes of those who for a livelihood follow the little figures on the tape of the stock ticker. Steadfastly he kept to the safe and sane paths which common sense told him led to the goal of his great ambition.

The name of the object of Philip's love was Muriel Leigh. The world in which they both lived would have considered her an excellent wife for the young architect. She had all the attributes necessary to match those of Philip, and, in addition, her mother was possessed of an ample fortune.

For a year Philip's courtship ran smoothly. Nothing definite had been arranged, nor had an engagement even been suggested, because Philip did not feel that his financial position justified a proposal. How-

ever, he was progressing, if but slowly. He had his ten thousand dollars in the best of gilt-edged securities, and, according to the well established signals known to lovers, he was daily gaining a surer hold on the affections of Muriel. He talked with her at dinners, danced with her at dances, and frequently met her at week-end parties, when they played golf and tennis and took long walks together. To their friends the eventual engagement of the young couple seemed inevitable.

How Mrs. Leigh regarded the young architect's attentions to her daughter, Philip did not know. Mrs. Leigh ran so true to type, was in all ways so much like the comic supplement idea of a rich New York society matron, that she appealed to Philip as a stage character rather than a real person. What was going on in her brain—that is, if she had a brain—Philip could not possibly imagine; but outwardly she treated him with the same disinterested civility that she showed toward all the other young men with whom she came in formal contact.

It was something more than a year after Philip had begun his courtship when he realized that Mrs. Leigh had definite views as to her daughter's future, and that he played no part in these plans whatever.

The basis of Mrs. Leigh's schemes—in fact, her whole scheme—was the marriage of Muriel to Robert Gerard, a retired banker. Gerard was not an old man. He had retired because he had accumulated more money than he could possibly spend, and because he preferred to devote his energies to such charities and altruistic deeds as would give him the broadest publicity and the greatest number of foreign decorations. The thought of a bright ribbon in his buttonhole made his slight frame quiver with excitement, and gave his narrow, colorless face an expression that was almost human. Apparently, while in a generous mood, his eyes had fallen on the beautiful Muriel, and he had decided to allow her to share the glory that was to accrue from the honors his great wealth was going to buy.

When the rumor first reached Philip that Gerard was a suitor for Muriel's hand and heart, he laughed at the audacity of the man. Philip had known Gerard slightly for some time, and, with the inevitable intolerance of youth, had regarded him with an amused contempt. However, when the rumors had become sufficiently numerous,

Philip's smiles gave way to moments of irritation and annoyance, and he decided that for his own peace of mind he would prove them incorrect and wholly groundless.

On his next visit to Muriel, perfectly sure of the girl's love for himself, he jestingly referred to the malicious gossips who had linked her name with that of Robert Gerard. The scene that followed was indelibly etched on Philip's mind, and for long afterward he recalled it as if it had happened the day before.

They were seated across the tea table in Muriel's cozy little living room, where she received only her intimate friends. The glow from the last rays of the setting sun gently touched the silver tea things and Muriel's demure and lovely face. At the mention of Gerard's name, Philip was surprised to see that the girl's cheeks reddened perceptibly, her eyes became a little misty, and she slowly lowered them before his incredulous gaze.

"Why, Muriel!" Philip gasped. "You don't mean—"

With a rather sorry effort at bravado, Muriel raised her eyes and looked fairly into those of Philip. When she spoke, her voice was very low and very unsteady.

"Yes, Philip," she said. "I am engaged to Mr. Gerard."

II

It is difficult to predict just how any man will act when the ambition of his life is suddenly snatched from his grasp. In this particular case the man smiled broadly and shook his head.

"But, Muriel," he said, "you can't marry Gerard. You love me and I love you. Anyhow, he's not a man—he's just a poor shrimp. Of course, he has plenty of money, but so have you. There would be no excuse for you at all."

"Mr. Gerard is a very fine man and a very good man," Muriel protested. "My mother is very fond of him."

"Oh, no, she's not!" Philip laughed. "Your mother isn't fond of any one, except perhaps herself. She isn't even fond of you, if she wants to marry you to that monkey!"

In a most dignified and somewhat frightened manner Muriel arose and faced her rejected suitor.

"Good-by, Philip," she said. "You really must go now. I've got to dress for dinner."

Philip pulled himself out of the deep chair in which he had been sitting, and bowed low over the hand, cool and unresponsive, that Muriel held toward him. Then he spoke to the girl calmly, and without any perceptible trace of inward anger.

"Muriel," he said, "simply as a matter of expediency, I think you are making a mistake in marrying for money—for money is the only thing that Gerard has got that I haven't. I don't believe you are the kind of girl who is going to be happy just because her husband can supply her with the fleshpots. You're much too fine for that!"

Muriel did not take his words at all as Philip had expected her to take them. Apparently she was neither surprised nor hurt. Indeed, it seemed to be a new Muriel, a Muriel whom he had never met before, who was talking to him.

"I suppose it's my training, Philip," she said; "but if I married you, I'm quite sure mamma would cut me off, and—and—well, I doubt very much if I could be happy, even with you, without the fleshpots. You see, I've lived in the most criminal state of luxury all my life; and, to be quite frank, I don't believe you could support me in a criminal state of luxury. Now could you?"

"Sure I couldn't!" Philip said, and smiled grimly. "I might some of these days—by the time you were a nice old lady. As a matter of fact, it's probably very doubtful if I ever could. I certainly can't recall any of my ancestors who died rich; but most of them were men who had done something worth while, and who got their reward after they were through. Most of the Adams men have had large funerals, and that's a pretty good tribute to what a man has accomplished, rather than to how many securities he has left to his relatives. No doubt Robert Gerard will have a fairly showy funeral at St. Thomas's—if St. Thomas's is still the fashionable church at the time of his demise—but the brains of the mourners won't average very high, and the chances are that they'll have done as little for humanity as Gerard himself."

Muriel smiled, as if not quite convinced by Philip's reasoning.

"One's funeral seems a long time to wait for one's reward," she said. "I'm afraid I should prefer my reward when I could get the fun out of it, rather than my mourning but proud family. However, I suppose that that, again, is my faulty training. You see, I can't quite appreciate the feelings

of an Adams, because the men of my family never did very much except make money, and probably they were too busy doing that to worry about who would come to their funerals. Now, Philip, you must run along—I've really got to dress!"

Smilingly Philip rose to take his leave.

"Anything I might say would sound like heroics," he said; "and as I hate heroics, I won't say anything. Good night, Muriel, and good luck to you!"

"Good luck to you, Philip," the girl smiled back at him, "and a grand funeral; but I hope you'll have all kinds of success and happiness in the meantime!"

III

WHEN Philip had reached his room, he lit a pipe, sank into a low chair, and rested his feet on the fender of his fireless hearth. After an hour he got up and slowly began to dress for dinner.

During that hour of reflection he had definitely decided to change his career—that is, all of it that Muriel Leigh had not already changed. On the following morning he would resign from the firm of architects who employed him, accept the most advantageous offer he could get from a brokerage house, and in all ways follow his own gay inclinations. He had tried to be a hard-working, stodgy, reputable member of society, and it had brought him nothing that he had really cared for. Henceforth, the more reckless the enterprise, the more eagerly he would seek it and all its accompanying thrills.

Of several tentative offers that had been made him by his Wall Street friends, there was one that stood clearly out from the others. Regarded from his changed point of view, it seemed to be the only logical one. The two members of the firm of Benson & Peabody were young and aggressive, eminently successful in business, and warm friends of Philip. It was with them, therefore, that he decided to cast his fortunes.

A few days after his interview with Muriel, her engagement to Gerard was officially announced. If the defeated suitor was in need of the sympathy of his many friends, he did not show it. Some said that, being an Adams, he was too fine a person to wear his heart on his sleeve.

"Phil is a good loser," others observed, and let it go at that.

Apparently he was greatly interested in his new business, and successful in it. He

moved to an expensive apartment, where he gave entertainments that were always in good taste and frequently lavish. As a matter of fact, no sooner had he tied himself up with his brokerage firm than he began to speculate with his patrimony; and, as often happens to beginners, his ventures proved profitable.

When he met Muriel, as he often did at dinners and dances and week-end parties in the country, his manner was friendly; but she was conscious that he avoided being left alone with her. Also, having known Philip so well and for so long, she noted that where he had once drunk two glasses of champagne, he now drank three. Indeed, to her knowing eyes, her former lover was showing, in many ways, a certain recklessness which was quite unlike his old self.

Had she not been always conscious that their last serious talk had thrown up a barrier between them, she would have warned Philip against the changes that had overtaken him. Many times she regretted much that she had said at what had proved to be their virtual farewell. Had she been more sympathetic, and responded less flipantly to his remark about big funerals, she believed that she might have held his friendship, and might have been of some help to him when he needed help.

It was not long before others saw the change in Philip. When his speculations turned from gains to losses, he became so reckless in his manner and in his mode of life that it was evident to all—especially to the members of his firm, who had both a business and a friendly interest in his personal account. It was, indeed, quite evident that unless he stopped gambling, he was headed for the financial rocks.

Kindly warnings influenced him not at all. All signs seemed to indicate that Philip was riding for a fall; and of course, in due time, the fall came. When the final accounting was made, his firm lost nothing, except Philip's services—which, as a matter of fact, had not proved to be of any particular value.

His business career at an end, Philip did not remain long among the scenes where he had once played so pleasant and conspicuous a part. He left no debts, no obligations, not even a good-by. Square with the world in which he had lived, and of which he had been an ornament, he vanished from it completely.

There were many friends who would have

given him a position, or would have helped him in a financial way; but it seemed as if Philip wished either to begin life anew, or to go to the devil completely. Whichever the alternative, the scene was evidently to be far away from his old haunts and old associates.

It is not entirely true that he left no farewells, for he sent a bunch of flowers and a card to Muriel Leigh. The inscription on the card was:

Good-by, Muriel, and good luck.—PHILIP.

For some reason Muriel never mentioned the incident to any one, not even to her *fiancé*; and yet Philip Adams, good-looking, amusing, assertive Phil, was the most clear-cut and the most often recurring memory in Muriel's life. Dancing, or dining, or playing golf, or just dawdling in her home, there always seemed to be something to remind her of his cheerful laugh and his pleasant, chivalric ways.

Any ornament, however brilliant, if taken from a cabinet, is not long missed, and Philip quickly faded from the memory of his friends; but Muriel remembered. She often wondered what he was doing at just that particular moment. Once she heard a doctor describing the electrocution of some poor devil of a murderer at Sing Sing. When the physician told how the switch was turned on that shot the electricity through the man's body, and sent him to eternity, Muriel closed her eyes and dug her finger nails into the soft palms of her pink and white hands.

"That's just what I did to Phil!" she whispered to herself. "Poor, dear old Phil—I killed him!"

IV

THE first news that reached New York, or the part of New York that had known Philip Adams, came about a year after his sudden and silent departure. A man who had been a friend of his earlier years met him on a passenger boat which plied between several of the larger ports of the West Indies, and on which Philip was acting as purser. He looked much older, and as if broken in health. When greeted by his former friend, his only desire, apparently, was to be left alone. The story was told in various clubs and at many dinner parties, created a mild interest, and was quickly forgotten.

When Muriel, now Mrs. Robert Gerard,

met the man who had seen Philip, she tried, with an apparently indifferent manner, to learn more details of the present life of the man whom she had rejected; but she was not particularly successful. All the returned traveler could tell her was that Philip appeared old, tired, and ill—whether from hard work, or worries, or drink, he did not know, and certainly Philip himself had made no effort to inform him.

The next word of Philip that reached Muriel was also the last. She heard it at a dinner—a very formal dinner, at which she took no interest in any of the guests, not even in her husband. The man who told the story was now the managing editor of a great newspaper. He had once been a star reporter, and hence not only knew the value of a good news story, but also knew how to tell it.

He was sitting directly across the table from Muriel, who was carrying on a casual, commonplace conversation with the man on her right. Suddenly there was something in the tone of the editor's voice that seemed to announce:

"Now I'm going to tell you a story that's worth while. Every one had better listen."

So Muriel turned from her dull neighbor on her right, and listened.

The editor's slightly raised voice, or the something in his tone that had arrested Muriel's attention, seemed to have had a similar effect on the other guests at the long table. Finding all eyes focused upon him, the speaker, always alert to take full advantage of his opportunity, began his tale with much deliberation.

"The story reached the office," he began, "just before I left to go uptown—too late, I'm happy to say, for the evening edition. I suppose it appealed to me particularly because it's one of those stories that would have only a local interest if they weren't handled by a man who knows news values. By sheer good luck we had a really fine reporter at Rio—a man named Bowen who was down there to write some special articles. When he heard of this wreck, he interviewed the passengers, saw that the story had news interest for New Yorkers, and cabled it on. It's really a great human interest story, and I hate to spoil it. You can read it to-morrow morning on the front page, and it's worth reading, believe me; but if Bowen hadn't happened to be at Rio, it wouldn't have been

worth more than half a dozen lines. Perhaps that's what interests me most, because, unlike most of yourselves, I didn't know the man it's all about."

The speaker stopped. As no one else spoke, he began the story with dramatic effect.

"The steamer was called the Santa Maria, and carried passengers and freight between Rio and a number of small South and Central American ports. She was a rotten old tub, and had been condemned, but you know what graft is in Rio; and the owners decided to take a chance and send her on one more voyage. Before she was a day out, she ran into one of those tropical storms that come from nowhere, leave death and destruction in their wake, and then hurry on to do more mischief. Anyhow, this particular storm left the Santa Maria a total wreck. The pumps wouldn't work, and such discipline as there had been turned into complete panic. The crew, made up of no-good Central Americans, rushed the officers, put them out of commission, and started for the lifeboats and the rafts. The passengers—a mob of poor peasants who were on their way back to their homes—made no resistance, but ran about the decks, screaming for help, and getting nowhere.

"So far, of course, the disaster has no place on the front page of a big daily. The value of a disaster to a newspaper is in the prominence of the people who suffer from it. That is why the sinking of the Titanic and the Lusitania made two of the greatest newspaper stories ever printed. Their passenger lists were made up of men and women big in the political or financial or social world of Europe and America. The passengers of the Santa Maria were a lot of unknown South American farmers and laborers, whose names meant nothing except to their relatives."

The editor stopped for a moment, moistened his throat with a lingering sip of champagne, caught an approving and understanding glance from his hostess, and went on.

"Now comes the news interest of the story. When the panic was at its height, and the crew was about to make its getaway in the boats, leaving the passengers to their own devices, the situation, as it sometimes does, created its own savior. He was a common seaman, but, according to Bowen and the evidence of the passengers,

he must have been a natural organizer. With the help of a belaying pin he toppled over the leaders of the insurgent crew, somehow or other pacified the crazy passengers, and, in an extraordinarily short time, brought a kind of order out of what had been complete chaos. The boats and rafts—which, as is usual on such coastwise steamers, were wholly inadequate—were filled and lowered. At last only the captain and the seaman who had saved the day were left on the ship. The captain was still pretty woozy from the rush his crew had given him, so the seaman helped him down a rope ladder that was dangling over one of the already overcrowded boats, and then started to follow him.

"Just as the sailor had a good grip on the ladder, an old woman rushed out on the deck. It turned out afterward that she had been shut in somewhere in the steerage quarters, but had finally broken loose. Of course, when she reached the deck, she was in a complete state of hysteria; but our plucky seaman, still on the job, climbed back over the rail, gathered up the poor terrified soul, and gently but firmly placed her on the ladder, from which she eventually dropped into waiting arms in the lifeboat. Incidentally, the seaman went down with the ship."

"Extraordinary man, and an extraordinary tale!" said Robert Gerard, from far down the table. "All the more extraordinary because one hardly expects such an exhibition of calm bravery from one of those excitable South Americans, under such unusual conditions."

The editor smiled.

"But you see the common seaman wasn't a South American. That's precisely what makes the story a front-page story. He was a North American—a New Yorker, bred and reared in the social purple, who,

for some unknown reason, disappeared about two years ago."

Muriel Gerard had slowly turned her eyes away from the editor. Until the story was finished, they remained fixed on a bowl of flowers that stood on the table just before her.

"And you say the man went down with the ship?" the hostess asked. "Why do you suppose he did not take his chance with the others?"

The editor pursed his lips and smiled at his questioner.

"Well, according to Bowen, the boats were dangerously overcrowded. It may have been, too, that having done his bit, life held no further interest for him. But I've butchered the story. You must read Bowen's account to-morrow. It's really a bully bit of descriptive writing—the lone man on the deck, leaning cross-armed over the rail, his figure silhouetted against the storm clouds, looking down at the upturned faces of the crowded boats, the whole mob begging their deliverer to join them; and then the big black hulk, suddenly trembling as if in its death throes, making a deliberate nose dive, bound for the bottom, and leaving nothing but a caldron of seething waters and wreckage."

With an eye to the proper dramatic climax, the editor had carefully concealed the name of his hero; but now his story was at an end, and the moment for the dénouement had arrived.

"I particularly liked the last line of Bowen's story. It follows his description of the disappearance of the ship, as it plunged down amid the cries and the prayers of the men and women in the lifeboats. The line is:

"And thus, chivalric and unafraid, Philip Adams met his death. Few men have had a finer funeral."

RAIN ON THE MOUNTAIN PEAK

ALL day relentless rain swept down,
And wrapped the mountain peak in mist;
But now the sunset's crimson glow
With evening keeps a transient tryst.

The light streams swiftly from the west
In regal pomp of gold and red,
And like a heavenly artist weaves
A nimbus round the mountain's head.

William Hamilton Hayne

The Necessary Spark

A VETERAN OF THE CHAUTAUQUA CIRCUITS HAS A NEW EXPERIENCE

By Oney Fred Sweet

GEORGE RUNKELL had given his lecture on Chautauqua platforms for so many years that it was possible for his thoughts, at times, to wander away from his audience during the narration of an anecdote or the repetition of a phrase. His "Silver Lining" message was no longer an extemporaneous oratorical effort. It had stood the test of time so long that experienced bureau managers had for two decades selected its author and expounder for the initial number of their seven-day programs, confident of its reaction upon the communities they served. And inasmuch as routine had gradually permitted for the "philosopher of sunshine" a double-tracked mind while he spoke in public, he was conscious, in his opening day of the summer season in Meadowville, of certain sounds that emanated from beyond the khaki curtains of the dressing room, below and to the left of him in the big brown tent.

The sounds had been slight—the result, really, of studied efforts at silence. The twang of a stringed instrument being incased, the springing back into place of a piece of pine flooring accidentally stepped upon, the backward and forward swish of a shining cloth against the toe of a shoe—in short, the two Damerons, having finished their prelude, were preparing to leave "the lot."

It was when Dr. Runkell reached his peroration—his insistence that matters were never so bad but what they might be worse, his assurance that there was no road so long but that it had a turning, his contention that a smile should light the features, no matter how trying the situation—that he observed the team of entertainers rounding the edge of the Chautauqua tent.

Owing to the sultriness of the June day, the canvas walls had been lifted by the crewboys, and the movements of the Damerons, as they picked their way over the guy ropes and across newly mowed weeds, furnished a rival attraction which the lecturer, high-powered though he might be, found difficult to combat. Action, pitted against sound, was having decidedly the better of it.

Even as he closed with the statement that on the other side of every gathering of vapor there was glitter instead of gloom, Dr. Runkell, from the tail of an eye, was watching the departure of the couple with whom he knew that he would have to spend much of his time during the sixteen-week season just being launched.

It was the Dameron woman who was most in evidence—she who had played the saxophone solo while Dr. Runkell waited at the back of the tent for the moment of his own appearance. Mrs. Dameron could, without fear of contradiction, be described as heavy-set. She seemed perfectly willing to let her alert, nervous husband lead the procession away from the grounds. She was taking her time. She seemed wholly unmindful of the fact that, inasmuch as she and her husband had seen fit to traverse the space in full view of the audience, those on the plank seats were likely to take advantage of the opportunity to observe what the musicians looked like "off" as well as "on."

The climax of Dr. Runkell's lecture suffered, as a consequence. He could not compete with a street dress that had supplanted a spangled stage costume, with hair that afforded debate as to whether it had or had not been touched up with henna, with a peculiarly shaped instrument case,

with—well, with the team that was supposed to depart from the scene for good when it had finished its prelude.

As Dr. Runkell closed, there was applause; but he was accustomed to that. He was among polite people, and he realized that a percentage of the expression of appreciation was purely perfunctory. He wiped the perspiration from about his collar, and removed his alpaca coat.

His concern, now, was about a boarding place. He had arrived in Meadowville barely in time for the afternoon program. He had heard, but had not seen, the musical duo, until they came from the platform with the information that they had completed their number.

"We've warmed 'em up for you," the banjoist had advised him. "Go on now and knock 'em dead!"

Dr. Runkell, in his career as a Chautauqua lecturer, had been associated with all sorts of people who furnished musical preludes, but hitherto the pianists and readers and violinists had been persons possessing at least a measure of refinement. For this season just starting—well, the Damerons had flashed a first impression that was disconcerting. He knew how intimately the members of the same day's program were thrown together, and sixteen weeks was a rather long stretch.

That evening, in the carpeted, curtain-shaded, slant-floored dining room of the Commercial Hotel, Dr. Runkell found himself seated opposite the lady with the henna hair and her partner.

"How's the steak, doc? First time I've seen one of those trick casters on a table for ages!" Mr. Dameron glanced about the room for the waitress. "We ain't got any too much time, if we're going to get in a rehearsal. Wish Eastman had told me we had the whole program at night! We'll have to run over that medley again. You're flat there in one place, Mae. You know, we thought we was going to spend the summer at Sheepshead Bay. 'Chautauqua!' I says to Eastman, when he phoned me to come in. 'Chautauqua! What is it?' I'd heard the word before, but that was about all. Good thing I worked all the way out here on building up a program! It 'll take us a day or two yet to know just what they want. I don't suppose I had five minutes there in Eastman's office, altogether. It was three o'clock then, and the train left at five.

What have you got, miss? You can make mine eggs, lookin' at me."

Mae yawned, and voiced her regret that she had not had time to get a shampoo before leaving New York.

Connie Dameron threw up his hands.

"You know how much time we had, pal! There's a lot of things I'd like to have got—extra banjo strings, some more of those soft collars that you can self laundry, and the right kind of liquid for my white shoes. Thing for us to do was to get to Meadowville. Well, there was such a town, and we're here. Let me get this thing, doc. Do we go on to-morrow to a new date? You only do the one turn a day, don't you? Well, that's enough when it's an hour and a half, single. Mae and me are new to this game. All we've ever done has been vaudeville. Ever do vaudeville, doc? Course, you'd have to trim down to not more than fourteen minutes, and make it snappier. We caught your act this afternoon from back of the tent."

"Might I not suggest," Dr. Runkell broached, "that you should refrain from walking around in view of the audience until after I have finished my afternoon discourse? If you could take your departure, say, from the rear of the pavilion—"

"Did it bother you? Say, that's a shame!" Mr. Dameron was filled with self-reproach. "I'm sorry. We won't do it again. You see all this is new to Mae and me. There was a cow staked out across the alley, and Mae thought mebbe it might get loose. Last thing we'd ever do is anything like that, intentional. We never played under canvas before, and it's all different."

II

DR. RUNKELL arose with dignity and pushed his chair beneath the table. He went to his room—bed, chair, and a stand with washbowl and pitcher. From his window he got a panoramic view of Meadowville—the tin roofs of half a dozen places of business, a cluster of white houses, vacant lots, a garage built of cement blocks, a low depot, a tall grain elevator, cornfields stretching in every direction. The sun was losing none of its intensity as it neared the horizon.

The sky, in fact, was unusually clear. The country needed rain, and Meadowville was in a mood to welcome shadowed heavens for a spell, whether the other side of

the clouds should be silvered or no. Dr. Runkell was weary. For twenty years he had traversed the country, speaking in churches and lodge halls, and on lyceum and Chautauqua platforms. He looked much older than he had when his photograph that was used for window cards had been taken. His hair was black then; now it was snow white.

He fumbled among the letters in his grip for the envelope, recently received from the bureau, which contained the itinerary of his towns for the summer. There were a few more than a hundred towns listed. Some of them could be found on the map. Perhaps he had been in a few of them before. He could not always remember. He had lost his faculty for retaining impressions of places.

Accompanying the itinerary was a letter which had hitherto escaped the lecturer's notice. Following formal greetings and good wishes, Dr. Runkell came to this paragraph:

At the last moment we have been disappointed by the Philharmonic Trio, which was to have furnished your prelude, and we have been obliged to wire to New York for something of equal merit. The substituted organization should reach Meadowville in time for the opening program. We have arranged for our companies to travel by automobile this season.

By auto! Dr. Runkell gasped. Hitherto he had always journeyed by rail. He understood railroads, and knew their time tables by heart. He had spent so much time waiting at stations that the long, iron-armed benches, the click of the telegrapher's key, the companionship of draymen and drummers, the regularity of irregular hours, had become a familiar part of his routine. He had spent as many hours on station platforms as on lecture platforms; and he had grown set in his ways.

The letter was signed "Elmore Lannigan, circuit manager." Dr. Runkell had met Mr. Lannigan at one of the fall conventions. Some time during the season, he would come out to see how the program was going. Runkell would see him then, and would tell the circuit manager what he thought of the type of people furnished him for his prelude. He would also give vent to his opinion concerning the innovation in transportation methods.

By the time the lecturer came down from his room, the shadows of night were falling, and to his ears there came the notes

of a saxophone as they floated off over the darkening prairies. The Damerons were holding forth.

Dr. Runkell had always held that the Chautauqua movement in America was on an exceedingly high plane. It had brought to the people the leaders of thought. Without taking a biased stand for any particular religious denomination or political faith, it had always stood for needed reforms, had been the means of lending enlightenment on world affairs, and had furnished entertainment, education, uplift, and inspiration. Dr. Runkell had taken deep pride in being connected with such an institution; but from his chair on the Commercial Hotel porch he could hear that the strains from the stringed instruments over on the edge of town, two blocks away, belonged to the style of music known as "jazz."

The fact that Meadowville, strolling past the porch on its way home, seemed none the worse for its evening's experience, raised the perpetrators of the program, in Dr. Runkell's estimation, not a jot. It was true, no doubt, that the public might admire a nice, home-loving couple very much, and yet not care to hear them play the ukulele. On the other hand, it would probably be able to overlook certain peculiarities in the personalities of its entertainers, providing they were capable of rendering "Little Gray Home in the West" in a manner that brought tears to the eyes and a lump to the throat.

That was not the question, however. The audiences were to have the Damerons only during such time as they would be on the platform. Dr. Runkell was to have them at meals three times a day, and to be crowded with them in a car on the highway, as well.

Next morning the lecturer was aroused from his sleep by a rap on his door.

"That you, doc? Thought we ought to get an early start. Fellow down at the garage says we've got a forty-mile jump this morning."

The lecturer was not a profane man, but he muttered on his way to breakfast. He found the Damerons awaiting him. Mae looked a bit sleepy, but Connie was as eager as a schoolboy. The Ford had been intrusted to his guidance.

"I tell you, Mae, a lot of folks are payin' out good money for an outing like this! Here we are, just the same as tourists—given a car to drive, and everything. Noth-

in' but outdoor air and sunshine after bein' cooped up all winter in stuffy theaters and hotels!"

"We'll send a kodak picture of us back to Peggy—one showing us driving along."

"With me at the wheel," enthused Connie, reaching for the molasses.

There followed a conversation, spoken in a jargon unintelligible to Dr. Runkell, devoted to references to "Peggy" and other characters of a previous existence. Mae depended upon her husband for the answers to her questions about the country to be encountered, and concerning the Chautauqua system. Mr. Dameron's replies were for the most part wrong, but he rendered them with a voice and an attitude so decisive that his wife was left satisfied of his infallibility.

Occasionally Dr. Runkell was moved to offer a correction, but he ended by applying himself wholly to his wheat cakes. Misinformation regarding geography and agricultural conditions would probably make very little difference one way or another to the saxophonist, anyhow. Her faith in her husband's wisdom in connection with any topic that might come up for discussion was, Dr. Runkell saw, unbounded. Connie did the thinking for the two. He had traveled widely and read discursively, and was well versed in the ways and the wiles of the world. His comments were final. Mae never doubted, never disputed.

As Mr. Dameron paid his hotel bill with a certain hurried pomposity, the landlord remarked:

"Sure did like the way you folks played last night. 'Souvenir' and 'Meditation' were my favorites."

"How's that?" asked Connie, turning about in surprise.

Mr. Dameron had been a professional artist since boyhood, and it is the desire to share one's emotions with others that is the incentive for all art, but on his long "four-a-day" vaudeville tours it had been seldom that he had come in close contact with members of his audiences. He and Mae had been accustomed to walking unobserved along crowded streets as they hurried to and from the show houses, meeting only those of their own kind, living constantly in an atmosphere that was artificial. Connie was not as yet adjusted to the fact that a walk of three or four blocks in any direction from the center of Meadowville would land him in a cornfield.

Dr. Runkell, gathering up his baggage, realized more fully than ever, as he watched the musician react to the compliment, what a gulf there was between them. Quite unlike the career of the vaudeville team, his own experiences had been close to country lanes. He had known a great many Meadowvilles, and was thoroughly at home in such an environment.

Mae and Connie seemed to be under the delusion that they were no more beings set apart when they visited the post office than when they were on the stage. When Mae, coming halfway down the stairs, called to Connie, wanting to know if he had seen her massage cream, she seemed unconscious of the fact that the local banker, who was likewise chairman of the local Chautauqua committee, was at the time standing in the office. She and Connie were naïve enough not to realize that the proprietor of the drug store, who had no copy of the *Bill-board* on sale, was probably related by marriage to the man in the garage who had tried his best to outline the road to Weeping Willow, and that their conversation to one concerning the other should be guarded accordingly. During their twenty-four hours in town, the sophisticated Damerons had, in their simplicity, stumbled into situations from which they had redeemed themselves only through the rendition of a program which Meadowville, critical from many seasons of Chautauqua, considered all that could be asked for.

The time for departure was now at hand. Connie Dameron led the way to the car that waited over at the Goldenrod Garage. Could the fingers that plinked harmonies on the strings of a banjo manage the steering wheel of a Ford with equal facility? Connie did not know. He had played musical instruments all his life, and his experience with automobiles, thus far, had consisted mostly in dodging them at crossings; but he was undaunted.

The garage owner grinned, but Dr. Runkell, in the back seat, became a little concerned as the machine stopped and started under the banjoist's experimenting.

"You see I have to wait until the engine's going good, Mae, before I put my foot on the clutch."

Connie spoke with all the confidence of one who had driven across the continent, rather than as one who, during a scant half hour the night before, had been initiated into the mysteries of the levers that meant

"reverse" and "stop" and go "ahead." It was somewhat like the starting and re-starting of a race horse; but finally they were off.

The country was beautiful at this time of year—the green corn stretching away in rows, birds singing from the posts of the barbed wire fences, a breeze that was perfumed by clover; but Dr. Runkell was about as peaceful of mind as if, without the aid of an anæsthetic, he was being wheeled into an operating room.

Connie's attention was but partially taken up with the car. The wheels bumped over ruts and edged close to roadside ravines, with no lessening of speed, while the driver gave to the woman beside him strange data concerning the crops. Oncoming vehicles were escaped by a hair breadth, but with perfect nonchalance. Connie strayed from the right road, and had to turn back. They ran out of water, and learned that drink for the tin beast was necessary. They experienced a puncture that meant riding for some miles on a rim; but Weeping Willow was reached in time for the afternoon program.

As he climbed, numbly—not nimbly—from the rear seat of the car, Dr. Runkell felt every one of his sixty-five years. His fatigue was not from aching muscles, but from frayed nerves. He thought of the hundred and one towns ahead, and of the mileage which, to the accompaniment of Connie's chatter, he would be obliged to cover in reaching them all.

Speaking in Weeping Willow that afternoon, the lecturer's smile was mostly on the surface. His anecdotes failed to bring their usual response, and his flowery flights were somehow faulty. A resident who had heard the doctor ten years before remarked, on leaving the tent, that "Runkell seemed to have lost his punch."

III

THE circuit had selected its route from the crossroad communities of three States. This territory, being uncharted in Connie's brain, held not the slightest terror for him, but the doctor secretly dwelt upon the distances to be endured. The lines about the lecturer's eyes and mouth, hitherto the chiselings of time "showing where the smiles had been," became sagging furrows peculiar to the cynic.

As they moved westward, Dr. Runkell not only traveled from one town of his cir-

cuit to another, but he went over all the vaudeville routes that had known the Damerons. He came to know Sheepshead Bay and its social standards like a book. The unseen "Peggy" was becoming more real to him than those who sat on the front row every afternoon.

"I must see Lannigan," the lecturer hinted, one broiling noon, during a long delay caused by a puncture. "I am told that he is coming out from the office and will be waiting for us at Bradford. I shall see him then. There are several things I wish to say to him."

There was a set look on the doctor's lips which did not escape Connie Dameron's shrewd notice.

"Lannigan?" questioned the banjoist, disturbing the elderly gentleman while he hunted under the seat for the jack and the tire pump.

"The manager," Dr. Runkell explained significantly. "I have been over three of his circuits. He is an old friend of mine."

"Yeah? What you goin' to tell him?"

"Several things."

"Oh!"

Connie dug about until he located the patent patching outfit. To him, the car had taken on human qualities. As its tin surface had tarnished and its axles become mud-caked and its top faded, the machine had somehow worked its way into his heart. Even when it disappointed at a grade or remained stubborn in a puddle, Connie coaxed rather than scolded it.

"Come on, Lizzie!" he would always say.

The terms that he applied were terms of affection. He pampered the roadster, took pride in its accomplishments, forgave its transgressions.

"You've said several times how you wanted to see Lannigan when we got to Bradford. Well, we'll be there a week from to-day!"

The banjoist whistled as he tugged the tire into place. Before starting on, he went to a farmyard and brought a pail of water for Lizzie to drink. A dog snapped angrily at his heels, but did not thwart him from his purpose.

By the time Hanlonville was reached, the last of the women in black silk, the girls in one-piece gowns, the old men with canes, and the boys with Valentino haircuts had come down the maple-shaded streets and were fanning themselves beneath "the

brown top." The superintendent—a school-teacher in winter—urged Connie Dameron to hurry into his blue serge and white flannels.

"I suppose you haven't had dinner yet, but the bunch is waiting."

"Sure!" agreed Connie.

Five minutes later the Damerons stepped from the folds of their black velvet, gold-monogrammed "drop" with all the freshness of June's roses. If Mae's features were unduly pink and white, they professionally radiated pleasantness; and there was no gain-saying that Connie, in parting his lips, made no attempt to conceal what the "painless dentists" had done for him.

Dr. Runkell saw the pair start to "pep it up" as he departed for a bit of lunch. It seemed to him that the Damerons were brighter and gayer than usual in their prelude. He had observed, as the days passed, that each audience that he faced appeared in a better mood than the audience of the day previous.

"We've got 'em warmed up for you!" the banjoist had a manner of confiding, as he came off the platform.

By gracious, they would have him talking their slipshod vaudeville lingo if he wasn't careful!

The lecturer's disposition was not a whit improved upon finding that the Gem Café had a sign on its door—"closed on account of Chautauqua." He returned to the rear of the tent, to wait for the Damerons' finale and Connie's grinning exhortation:

"They're yours now, doc. Knock 'em dead!"

But Dr. Runkell had lost his knack of "knocking 'em dead." Back in the closing days of his spring tour he had first been aware of a slump in his powers. Gradually it had dawned upon him that he no longer held his listeners in the hollow of his hand. After his two weeks of rest, he had expected to find his former punch returned to him; but ever since the summer season had started he had known that he was not hitting the mark.

Something had gone from him. He had lost the necessary spark. After a score of years of success, he was slipping.

Stepping before the good people of Hanlonville, Dr. Runkell forgot not a phrase. His voice rose and fell with the same old precision as he asserted that the darkest hour had a way of coming just before the dawn, and that the fellow worth while was

the fellow who smiled when everything went dead wrong.

Hanlonville, fanning itself, was courteous but not greatly concerned. If anything, as the effects of the musical prelude wore off, people seemed to relax into a rather sour state. If the lecturer could read their minds—and to a certain extent he could—it appeared very much as if Hanlonville rather thoroughly drifted back to its troubles before the hour and a half was over. When Dr. Runkell had launched into his introduction, even the wrinkled faces had been alert and lighted, as he had seen them of yore; but as he proceeded, it was thoughts of fallen markets, high freight rates, sickness, household cares, and taxes that again held sway, despite anything that he might be saying.

Thus it went. Towns appeared on the horizon only to be left the following morning, after being turned over to the second day program. Ever westward!

Instead of improving, matters grew steadily worse. Dr. Runkell had reached a point where he and the Damerons had less than ever to say to each other.

But his troubles were not only those of travel. At Denberry, at least a third of his audience left *en masse*, on the pretense that a storm was coming up, although the crew-boy sarcastically remarked that the cloud in the sky was probably one of the doctor's silver-lined affairs. A crew-boy's slur was the last straw. Dr. Runkell also had an undignified and disconcerting squabble with the proprietor of the Denberry House, because the latter refused to "check him out" for breakfast.

The trio reached Faulkner over a road that was in process of being graded. In time, the lumps would probably be worn down, but it meant missionary work for the car that did the new highway's christening. The tiny black cloud of the afternoon before had been an omen, but the storm held off until the "first day talent" had given to Faulkner its full performance.

Dr. Runkell had arisen from bed to close his window against the swishing rain when Connie Dameron, returning from the grounds, knocked at his door.

"Yes?" inquired Dr. Runkell crisply. "What is it?"

"I was just talkin' to the bird that runs the garage. He says Bradford is a hundred and ten miles, most of the way through sand, and to make it after all this rain

we'll have to start mighty early. How about leavin' here at three o'clock?"

"That would be an unearthly hour," gasped Dr. Runkell.

"I know; but the garage man says it would take him that long, and he knows the road. It's the longest jump we've got. Lannigan's to be at Bradford, you said. You've said several times how you wanted to be sure and see him and have some words with him."

"Yes, I have certain things to say to Mr. Lannigan; but if we leave here at three, we'll have no chance for breakfast."

"No, I guess not," agreed Connie, dripping, in the doorway. "I'll call you then. I always sleep light. Wanted to let you know."

IV

It was rather a haggard-looking party that the soggy dawn revealed five miles out of Faulkner, next morning. Connie had sensed the need of putting on chains before starting, and the task had taken time. The road, even at its beginning, was little more than a dim trail over the sand hills. It was practically unmarked, and the map scratched on an envelope, which had probably been clear enough to the native garage man, proved a puzzle to the amateur chauffeur.

A drizzling rain kept the wind shield covered with a mist which Mae, with her handkerchief, sought constantly to sop away. The numberless hills called for a continual shifting of the gears. It was a cattle country, a ditch and bridge arrangement at the far-flung fences thwarting the roving stock from grazing in forbidden pastures, but permitting the progress of automobiles. The groovelike structures demanded plenty of power in their approach, and the ditch awaited if there was any wavering at the wheel.

"It's like the fellow at the garage said," Connie commented, during a delay. "Sand can be tough stuff to go through, but he told me what to do."

The banjoist left the car and gathered grass, which he placed ahead of Lizzie much as a certain gallant of old threw his cloak in the mud that his queen might pass with dry feet.

"If it would just quit raining, now!"

But the skies remained leaden. The cold vapors crept to the very marrow. Dr. Runkell, huddling in his overcoat, noticed, as

Connie climbed back into the car, that there was something peculiar about his face. One of Connie's cheeks had lost its drawn look. His left jaw was swollen. Mae remarked about it.

"The painless dentists," Connie explained, his grin grotesque. "Must have put on that crown without treating the nerve. Lack of sleep probably started it, and the damp weather. Wonder if you haven't got a safety pin or something, Mae, so that I could fasten this flap! That's the idea—just the thing. We must have gone all of ten miles. The first hundred are always the hardest!"

Dr. Runkell looked at his watch. Perhaps Bradford might be reached in time, if nothing happened; but things would happen. Only a superoptimist could believe otherwise.

Right now the driver was not sure whether he should have turned to the left or to the right at the last place where the trail had forked. At the top of every hill another hill loomed. The surrounding country, in every direction, was treeless, houseless, fenceless. It was not unlike being adrift in a boat on a tossing sea and without a compass.

In the section where the plains were trying to leave off and the mountains trying to begin, nature seemed to have provided everything that would offer a hazard for a car. Lizzie skidded perilously down the slippery side of a ravine. Connie waited until they reached the bottom in safety before mentioning the fact that his brake wasn't working very well.

"Lucky, wasn't we?" he added.

Yes, they had been lucky, but they were not so fortunate in making the grade on the other side of the gully. The machine, heavily loaded with baggage, partially made the climb, but there was just one bump too many, one bit of incline that was too pronounced. Connie "gave her all she had," but to no avail. It was necessary for all but the driver to get out.

"Peggy ought to have a kodak of you now," chuckled Connie, as he watched Mae trudging the rest of the way up the hill through the driving rain.

A lone horseman suddenly gave a flash of life to the landscape. The bronzed features beneath his flapping hat made it plain enough that the rider was from the near-by Indian reservation. Connie questioned him in the language of Broadway, and received

the grunted information that he was out of the road to Bradford. They should have taken the other trail at the fork two miles back.

"What do you know about that, Mae?" remarked Connie, as he engaged in the struggle of turning about. "You've got something to tell your friends back in Sheepshead Bay! I've seen 'em in shows before, but that's the first time either you or me ever saw the real thing right where he lives. Lucky the big chief could talk plain enough to set us right again!"

Dr. Runkell groaned inwardly. The troublesome two miles had to be done all over again. There was a gnawing at the pit of the doctor's stomach, and the prospect of a meal was remote. It was raining harder than ever.

Aware, this time, of the faulty brake, Dr. Runkell held his breath as the car descended again into the gully. The bottom was reached—reached just as Connie, sticking his head out for inspection, guessed that he had a "flat."

"Thought it felt kind o' funny," Connie reflected. "Good thing it ain't the back tire. This one here's been mended a lot before, but the back tire's new. I'd a whole lot rather have it happen to the front tire than the back one."

Connie had not yet become an expert mechanic. It always took him some time to make a diagnosis, and when a tire was once made whole again it had to be cajoled back in place. This particular repair job took a long time.

When Connie returned, Mae called attention to the fact that the right hand that clutched the steering wheel was blood-spattered.

"Yeah—wheel came down on my fingers while I was tryin' to get the tire on. The jack came loose. Thought at first one of 'em was broken, but it ain't. See, I can work it back and forth fine and dandy. May hurt some, for a while, when I'm picking the banjo, but it's just as good as it ever was."

They chugged on, the sandy hills surrendering inch by inch. Noon, and they reached Kanawha—five buildings, counting a converted box car. They were halfway to Bradford. The woman in the restaurant eyed Connie as he spoke of the trip.

"Don't see how you ever made it. Traveling men call it the toughest piece of

road in the country. There ain't one of them that has ever tried it who would attempt it in this kind of weather. You say you've got to get to Bradford this afternoon? Good night!"

"You folks go ahead and eat, Mae. There's one thing about my jaw bein' in this shape—saves me board bills!"

Connie splashed over to the filling station, took on more gas, and was waiting for them out in front.

"Lucky we got here," he greeted. "We only had a gallon of juice left in the tank. Wonder we didn't have to back up some of those hills, but we don't have to worry any more about that now. I've got her full to the brim."

Only halfway!

"There's one stretch you'll never be able to make," the woman of the restaurant had predicted.

Dr. Runkell wondered which particular stretch she had had in mind. One mile didn't seem to prove any less impossible than another. There were places when a yacht would have been much more practical as a means of conveyance, and there were gaps that called for an airplane; but Connie kept his faith in Lizzie.

"Just one more hill, mebbe, honey, and we'll see the standpipe in Bradford. That's the baby!"

But the hills were endless, and the scene that met the eye at the crest of each was unchanging. It was long past the hour for the afternoon program. When Dr. Runkell dejectedly called attention to this fact, Connie surmised that there probably wouldn't be any audience, anyhow, on account of the rain.

The machine wallowed on, struggling to retain its equilibrium, hissing from overexertion. Connie expressed his belief that no other car would have made it.

There came a deeper moodiness to the atmosphere. There was less distinction between earth and sky. The sorrowful day was dying. The rain had never stopped for an instant.

"Fellow told me, back in Faulkner, this part of the State had always been dry out here," Connie remarked. Owing to his many efforts as a mechanic, he was soaking wet. "That's why the land is so much cheaper than it is farther to the east. Think what this rain's going to mean to this country! If this keeps up, they'll be able to grow anything!"

Connie's exuberance over what the moisture was going to mean to the crops of the section had scarcely been uttered before there came a clatter and a bang on the car's roof. Hail!

"Can you beat that?" Connie called out. "I've heard about 'em being as big as hen's eggs, but look at those babies! They'll never believe us back in Sheepshead Bay, Mae—never! Look at 'em!"

It was not necessary for Dr. Runkell to peer without. He held one of the huge hailstones in his lap. It had torn its way through the top of the car.

Just at this juncture, the machine, already moving slowly, came to a complete stop. Connie applied more gas, and pushed ahead with his body. It was no use. There had come a change in the nature of the soil. They were sinking in mud. They were stalled.

Dr. Runkell broke the long silence that had characterized his contact with the Damerons *en route*.

"Do you mean to say," he inquired petulantly, "that we are obliged to remain here in this downpour?"

His tone was one of utter disgust. His face was twisted with despair. This was the lowest ebb, the final depth!

Connie turned about in his seat.

"Not on your life, doc! We've pulled out of just as tough places as this. If we hadn't filled up there at Kanawha, I'd say we was out of gas; but we've got plenty of gas. Must be something wrong with the batteries. That's the trouble—plenty of gas, but no spark. We can't make it for this afternoon, anyhow, and it gives me a little chance to get the cramp out of my arms."

He tried to start the engine again, but in vain. The car was settling in its tracks. Lizzie gave the impression of being conquered. She was apparently willing to call it a day and camp down for the night.

Dr. Runkell sank lower in his seat, drawing his coat about his shivering shins. He half closed his eyes. Finally, above the swish of the rain and the clatter of the hail, he realized that Connie was still talking:

"No! I'll tell you, doc, it's always darkest just before the dawn, and every cloud has a silver lining. It's just as you said that first afternoon in Meadowville, when Mae and me was listenin' back there in the dressing room. Mae and me used to crab quite a bit on the road. There used

to be things that was trying; but you hit the nail on the head, doc. It's just as you say every afternoon—happiness is more an attitude of mind than anything else. It's a fact. First I was curious to know what your act was, and then, pretty quick, I forgot everything but what you was saying. Thought about myself, and about folks that I knew. All we got to do is look on the bright side. Ain't it the truth, I says to Mae—ain't it the truth? You made it so clear that it was a mistake to make a mountain out of a molehill. If a fellow would only realize that it's a long road that has no turning! Don't get you nothin' to harp on the dark side. If only a fellow would realize that every cloud—"

Dr. Runkell was experiencing very much the sensation of a man who first hears the record of his voice on a phonograph. These were all his phrases—phrases that he had uttered thousands of times—but how strange they sounded! They had become so mechanical through repetition that to his own ears they had become but words—just words. Twenty years with the same lecture—twenty years!

"It's just as you say—everybody has his troubles of one kind or another. It's the way we meet trouble that shows what kind of stuff we're made of!"

Connie was giving the words a glow. He was making the old maxims ring with meaning. He was taking the lecturer's stale sentences and returning them to him fresh. And how thoroughly he was putting their philosophy into practice!

"Nothing's ever so bad but what it might be worse. There ain't been an afternoon that me and Mae ain't stayed and listened. What's this jump to-day? Just an experience that we'll all laugh about next winter. I hate to miss the afternoon date, but outside of that Mae and me have been having the time of our lives. It's all in the way you look at it. We'll pull out of here, you see! We ain't listened to you every day for nothin', doc!"

He reached over and worked the key back and forth in the socket. Finally, as the result of his fussing, he was able to start the engine; but, though the water in the radiator hissed and boiled, the car refused to budge.

"Perhaps, if I get out and push—" Dr. Runkell suggested.

He found one of the rear wheels revolving around and around without striking any

substance on which it could take hold; but presently, either because of less weight aboard or because of the extra energy which the doctor lent, the car drew itself out of the muck.

Half a mile farther on, the machine turned into a marked and graded highway. The rain had stopped. As the car slid into Bradford, streaks of sunset glory came into the western sky.

V

THERE was a double program that night, to make up for the missed afternoon performance. As Dr. Runkell, who went on first, came, beaming, from the platform at the close of his address, he found Lannigan waiting for him.

"That was fine, doctor—fine!" glowed the manager, as they gripped hands. "I was watching the faces. You had them right at the start, and they were with you all through. Do you know, you did me worlds of good! You see, with the deflation of crops and the adjustment period and all, some of our towns have been hit pretty hard, and the attendance has been poor. I was a bit in the dumps myself before I heard your talk, but I feel altogether different now. If it could be measured in dollars and cents, you've done those folks out there a million dollars' worth of good. It isn't so much what you say—it's your sincerity, your tone of conviction. That optimism of yours is contagious. Oh, it's great!"

In the lecturer's eyes there was the old twinkle. It was a twinkle that had been missing since these closing weeks of his spring tour.

"Must have had a hard trip to-day, too," Lannigan went on. "We decided to make Bradford because the town wanted us so badly; but it wasn't until yesterday we found out what the roads were. We wired the talent to come on by train, and have the cars brought over, but I guess you couldn't have got the message. From now on the route is easy. This was our only hard jump, and everybody here tells me it was a bad one. Generally speaking, how do you like it by auto?"

"Splendid!" smiled the doctor. "Splendid! To-day was one of those trips that make you appreciate good roads the more; but the new method does away with waiting for trains, keeps us more in the open air, and gives us more time for rest. There

are so many night jumps when one goes by train. As you say, we'll soon be in territory where it will mean nothing more than pleasure drives. I like it!"

"Glad to hear it! Do you know, doctor, you ought to be good for another fifteen years! Hair's getting white, that's all. It's the spirit that counts."

There was a pause.

"I hope to be going another twenty years," Dr. Runkell mused almost reverently. "I hope to have that privilege."

Lannigan's voice changed.

"I don't mind being frank, doctor. Our reports on you thus far have not been very glowing this season. We were beginning to think, there in the office, that maybe—well, perhaps that you weren't striking fire any more. The reports were rather consistent." He brightened. "But after hearing you myself to-night—after watching that audience—my doubts are all gone."

"Like the old days, wasn't it?" nodded the lecturer. "Like the old days!"

"By the way," Lannigan continued, "you wrote me several times that you were anxious to see me when I came on. From your hints, I gathered that it was in connection with your prelude. I don't know anything about these people. We got them at the last moment. They were well recommended as musicians, but as to the kind of people they are—"

Dr. Runkell glanced over to the platform, where the swollen-jawed but otherwise debonair Connie was plinking out "Little Gray Home in the West" with bruised fingers. There was attentive silence out in the tent as the familiar strains revived memories and stirred hopes.

"I don't know much about them as musicians," Dr. Runkell finally admitted. "I am not a judge of that; but as people—"

His voice choked and his aged lips quivered.

"You've grown fond of them—that's it," Lannigan helped out.

Dr. Runkell nodded.

It was the recalling of something that Connie had said that enabled the old lecturer to regain his composure—something that chased away the tear with a smile. He spoke absent-mindedly:

"Connie said the trouble with our car this afternoon was that it had plenty of gas, but no spark. I wonder if he thinks Lizzie is the only thing that he got to going again!"

Drums in the Dark

THE STORY OF TWO WHITE MEN ON A JUNGLE ISLAND OF THE TROPICS

By Alexander Hull

NO doubt there are palmy, Elysian islands, neither hot nor cold, insectless but flower-fragrant, girt with beneficent sapphire seas—lotus isles where paradise condescends to be earthly and the earthly reaches up to become paradise, where life is simple, sweet, and Arcadian, and man is—well, scarcely vile at all.

There are such islands, and there is also Maiangoa.

Maiangoa is more like a point of land than an island. From an area of thousands of square miles of low country it projects into an estuary the color of campers' coffee dosed with condensed milk, many sluggish miles wide, and infested by crocodiles and deadly fevers. Still, by virtue of a narrow cross channel, it is actually an island.

The equator is a few degrees distant: hell, either of the two white men at Maiangoa would have admitted, is undoubtedly much nearer. While there are myriads of insects of biting and stinging and fever-transmitting habits, the variety and number of flies is something quite beyond the imagination. They breed in the decay of the slimy forests that close in upon Maiangoa, and they hover in dense black clouds around every creature that lives—or lies dead.

As for odors, no mere Latin derivative can do Maiangoa justice. It smells to high heaven. It reeks. Of what? Not just of mud, nor of vegetation, nor of primitive peoples and crawling creatures. These odors are in it, true; but over and above them there is the smell of a vast and horrible tropical corruption of unfathomable source.

No place for a white man, and poor enough for the natives. The climate is deadly. The black men die among the slimy mangroves like flies. The white men,

being fewer, wiser, better provisioned, and supplied with drugs—well, at least they may continue to exist.

In a world filled with garden spots, why should men dwell in such a place? Nevertheless, the Intertropic Trading Company established a post on Maiangoa. There was not much trade, the natives being too listless and enervated to bring in a great deal. One had to look beyond the immediate trade for the reason. The point was strategic, or supposed to be. It was at the mouth of a big river. The back country, now unproductive, was potentially rich. The company was forward-looking.

It was three months between boats. Why will men go to such a spot, mere agents, for no great pecuniary reward, and suffer? To that riddle, of course, there are many answers.

With Stephen Mayfield it had been partly youth, partly a thirst for adventure, partly curiosity. He had wanted to see the tropics, and of course he hadn't known what Maiangoa was like. All these motives had long since been satisfied. He was deathly sick of the horrible place.

He had stuck to it for eighteen months, mainly because he was too stubborn to admit at the outset that the island had, in the vernacular, got his goat; but he was going now. He was going back to the States. He was going on the next boat, and that might be any day. God willing, it might even be to-morrow!

He had fallen heir to a small competence in a small Middle Western town with wide streets, stores with false fronts, and ancient hitching posts. Beyond the stores there were little white cottages. The orderly green armies of the corn marched straight up to the picket fences of the cottages. There was frost on the pumpkins, in the

autumn, and there was ice on the ponds—ice—ice! Steve Mayfield was going home!

Nor was this desertion, for the last boat had brought a notification that henceforth Maiangoa would be a one-man station. The year before, a pestilence had decimated the already scanty contributions of the black men in the mangroves. The company had designated Herron as the man to stay; and, oddly, Herron had scarcely seemed to mind.

Steve Mayfield, standing in the visibly steaming compound, frowned as he thought of it. The truth was that there was something wrong with Paul Herron. He was up to something!

Herron had succeeded the man who was at Maiangoa for nearly four months after Mayfield's arrival. That man, Jones by name, had succumbed to fever. Steve, after heaping brush about the dead man's sleeping quarters, had cremated the body and had notified the company. No other course was safe, or possible.

In the interim before the arrival of a successor, the lone white man nearly went mad from the ghastly and threatening jungle silence. Then Herron came, and for a time he was friendly enough; but the friendliness had ended long ago.

What was the matter with him? Drink, of course; but that wasn't all of it. What was he up to? Steve didn't know exactly. Something to do with the natives, and something utterly abhorrent.

It was likely, for one thing, that Herron was a trifle mad. He had been touched by the malevolent, brassy sun, or by fever, or by the nameless, horrible thing that is the evil spirit of the evil tropics.

Convinced of this, Steve had put up with Herron's growing enmity, had sedulously avoided an open rupture. No matter what devilish business Herron might be about, it would have been folly to let the situation come to violence between them, the only two white men within reasonable distance. It hadn't been easy, exactly. The climate had its effect upon Steve's nerves, too; but he had done his best. They were both white, both American. Fight? Madness, indeed! And Steve had succeeded—at least, unless they quarreled before the boat arrived.

Well, they wouldn't. As a matter of fact, if the boat came to-night, as she very well might, they might never see each other again; for Herron again was missing.

Steve left the warehouse and crossed the compound. The heat was damp and stifling, and he was very tired. He had spent four maddening hours getting the shipments ready for the arrival of the steamer—work that should have been Herron's; but Herron had been gone two days.

The first time Herron disappeared, Steve had been alarmed. He had conscripted native guides and gone out to search for his colleague's remains, for he hadn't expected to see the man alive again. He had found him in a native village, bestially, unspeakably under the influence of some native drug.

Herron, returning, had boasted that he had been initiated into a native secret society, that he meant to become a thirty-third degree man, a high muckamuck, to gain control over the natives and become rich. All the same, the man was ashamed. He wouldn't meet Steve's eyes.

"Are you crazy?" demanded Steve. "Don't you know what 'll happen? They'll lose all respect for you, and they'll murder you. One of their witch doctors will stick a knife into you some night!"

Herron grinned derisively.

"And how, in God's name, could you, a white man, ever stomach the unspeakable orgies that—"

"My stomach's my own affair," said Herron, suddenly angry.

Well, it was, of course. The natives were addicted to the use of some particularly vile narcotic weed, and in their so-called religious orders its use played an important part. The plant produced an apathy, interrupted by brief spells of mad and uncoordinated activity. One of its stigmata was an angry inflammation of the eyelids.

Upon the sodden native its effect would be appreciably less than upon a white man's more susceptible organism. Steve suspected that Herron had used the drug more than once. Besides, mingling with the black men upon terms of equality was utterly fatal to the prestige and morale of the white man. After all, wasn't it, to an extent, Steve's business?

Nevertheless, five minutes of expostulation had convinced him of the futility of trying to influence Herron. There was, he had for some time suspected, a streak of looseness in the fellow which accounted for this folly.

At home in America, Herron would probably have descended no farther than to

dabbling in mild dissipations; but that was exactly the man for whom the tropics were fatal. Here there could be no such thing as moderation. One misstep began the inevitable descent into the abyss. It meant that the white man would eventually "go black"—an unspeakable infamy. Yet what would it avail Steve to quarrel with his colleague?

"Suit yourself, Herron," he said abruptly. "I'm not attempting to dictate to you. I'm only warning you."

"Good thing!" muttered Herron thickly.

A few weeks later he slipped out of the compound into the reeking bush, and was again invisible for several days. He returned as silently as he had gone, and slept in his bungalow for thirty-six hours in the stupor of utter exhaustion.

Mayfield said nothing, and ignored the incident. Horrible thing, nevertheless! Without question, the man was working his own doom. Either the jungle would swallow him up without a trace, or he would go mad in the end. Well, Steve would not be here to see it.

II

STEVE crossed to his bungalow, and in a few minutes came out again. Immense black clouds had climbed the sky, and were rearing their billowy and menacing tops just above the tangled green of the jungle. Within an hour there would come darkness and storm.

Steve crossed the hundred feet of ground that separated his sleeping quarters from those of Herron. Beneath the bamboo floor of the veranda lay Herron's servant, dead to the world, snoring, unconscious of the biting black flies that swarmed upon him. As Mayfield mounted the steps and entered the bungalow, the boy didn't interrupt even for an instant his rhythmic and stertorous breathing.

"Herron!"

But Herron had not returned.

Steve stood for a moment in indecision. Then his eye encountered a photograph on the table.

A girl, flushed with youth and charm, with clear eyes which were pools of innocence, yet which looked out at the world with wistful bravery. She was lovely, she was—oh, so obviously!—all that was sincere and sweet.

It was not the first time Mayfield had seen the picture. On the day of Herron's

arrival at the post, he had watched it fall from the newcomer's packing bag. He had stooped, retrieved it from the floor, and given it to Herron, who, with a short laugh, had carelessly tossed it upon the table.

Half a hundred times since, Mayfield had seen the photograph, always lying upon that table, amid a disorderly accumulation of toilet articles, smoking things, and miscellaneous junk. It had become so worn and battered that only the faintest trace of the original inscription remained:

To dear Paul—Elsie.

That first night, seeing it, something queer happened to Steve Mayfield. Perhaps the silence and horror of the months he had just passed with Jones, the sick man, had had something to do with it. Perhaps it was his loneliness. Such experiences immeasurably quicken the moving arc of a man's emotional progression.

Whatever the explanation, the picture had touched to flame some spiritual candle that burned deep within him. It was something like a miracle—to pass, between one moment and the next, from free to bond; but Steve Mayfield had done it. He had fallen in love with a cabinet photograph.

He stifled a deep surge of feeling as Herron flung the pasteboard on the table, and said quietly:

"Pretty girl! A relative?"

Again Herron laughed briefly.

"Hardly," he said ironically. "Just a girl I was engaged to, back home."

A girl—not even *the* girl! Patiently, casually, Steve went on:

"Was—and now aren't?"

Herron faced him, smiling.

"Well, I hardly know. I suppose I might say I still am, if I want to be!"

"Yes?"

"You see—er—Mayfield, I've done quite a bit of the world since that time. Five years and a half since I saw her last. She was a nice little thing. Well, my taste for nice little things isn't exactly what it was. I like something spicier now; but suppose I should change my mind again? I haven't quite broken the affair off. Little Elsie is still waiting for me—if I decide to go back."

"I see!" said Steve, very quietly.

Herron had convicted himself. Steve knew, now, what sort of man had come to be his assistant; but nothing was farther from his mind than revealing himself to

Herron. He changed the subject, but reverted to it later, and finally learned the girl's name and her town.

To-day, as he looked at the picture, it cast its old spell upon him. He sank into Herron's chair by the table, and was lost in reverie.

Yes, such a girl might be faithful. Seeing Herron as he was now, Steve could legitimately doubt the faithfulness of any woman to such a man; but he remembered that Elsie Merritt had not seen him since he came to Maiangoa. His deterioration, once begun, must have been rapid in the fetid air of the tropics, where evil things grow monstrously.

Perhaps—probably—Paul Herron, in those days gone by, was just an ordinary young man with pleasant manners, and with no hint of the dry rot that had begun within. The girl was very young. Some chance bit of glamour about him, now gone, might have blinded her. She had been faithful, perhaps, not to the actual Herron, but to her ideal, to the man she supposed him to be.

To believe that she would remain faithful when she had seen him again was to give the lie to all that lay in those candid, clear eyes of hers. Being faithful to her ideal, she must needs reject the actual Herron.

If, thought Steve, he could only take Herron back to her, so that she could understand! For he meant, as soon as he reached his own country, to go to Elsie Merritt, to ply a suit that he feared might be utterly unsuccessful.

There was an outburst of mocking laughter behind him. Steve wheeled abruptly, and sprang to his feet.

"Herron!"

For it was Herron who had slipped in, caked with the slime of the jungle, barefooted, red-eyed. He had slipped in like a snake, noiselessly.

"Mooncalf!"

Mayfield flushed, knotted his hands into fists, then unclenched them.

"Mooncalf!" repeated Herron.

"Don't be a fool, Herron!" said Steve quietly.

"Me? A fool? Never!" declared Herron. "I wouldn't poach on your little specialty!"

"Stop it!" said Mayfield. "I'm pretty well fed up with you, anyway. I've been sweltering all day over your shipments,

while you—but it's silly to quarrel now. I'll be gone in a few days at the outside. Let's keep the peace."

An evil grin appeared on Herron's grimy, unshaven face.

"Yes, you'll be gone," he remarked, with a sort of inexplicable, sardonic pleasure in his tone. "You'll be gone—and a damned good riddance!"

"That's all right, Herron."

"Is it? I don't think! What are you doing in my quarters, mooning over my girl? How do you get that way? All right! You'll change your tune before long!"

Something in his voice suggested a definite implication in this indefinite threat. Mayfield again forced his anger down.

"You'll pipe another song!" Herron went on. "Until the boat comes and you go, I'd advise you to stay out of here. I can get along very well without you driveling over my girl!"

"Your girl!" said Steve contemptuously.

"Yes, mine—mine! You didn't think you'd ever get her, did you?"

"I don't know; but, by Heaven, you've had your chance, and you've lost it! You could have kept yourself clean and decent. You didn't. I don't know what sort of a chance I've got, but I warn you I'm going to take it! She's nothing to you, and never has been. I'm going home, and I'm going after her!"

"Good hunting!" said Herron, with a sinister chuckle.

As he spoke, the rain began. It fell straight down in huge drops, striking the beaten ground as with the thunder of countless millions of little thudding feet. The light sensibly lessened, and though it was still two hours until sunset the interior of the bungalow grew almost dark. Herron lighted his kerosene lamp, which hung from a wall bracket, with a reflector of quicksilvered glass behind it.

"Going?"

"In a minute," said Mayfield. "There are one or two things to be said about the shipments, though. The ivory doesn't tally."

"Insinuating that I've—er—misplaced any of it?"

"No, but your reports will have to be altered. That's up to you. I won't do it. You'd better do it soon. The boat—"

He broke off. Above the steady, subdued roar of the rain a hoarse, long-drawn bellow

rose and soared, booming over the river and the jungle. The sound died away, and then, at a short interval, came again from the distance.

"The Mesurado!"

"Exactly," agreed Herron. "The natives sighted her two hours ago. That was what brought me in."

Mayfield hesitated. Then he said:

"Herron, let's part friends. The Mesurado will be in the river within an hour. I'll go aboard to-night. You don't owe me any enmity. As for Elsie Merritt, you know yourself she's out of the question for you. You'll never go back to her. You haven't the least intention of doing so. You've no right to hold on to her. She ought to have her chance for life and happiness. If I can give it to her—"

Suddenly Herron dropped on his bed and burst into wild laughter, holding his muddy sides, rocking back and forth deliriously. That very word, indeed, passed through Mayfield's mind. Herron, he was certain, had been using the native drug, and delirious was exactly what he was.

"You-oo-oo'll k-k-kill m-me!" gasped Herron. "You f-f-fool! She's on that b-b-boat!"

III

WHAT was that? The man, of course, was mad; but had he said that the girl was on the Mesurado?

"She's on that boat," repeated Herron. "Lord, what a joke! You're going home, are you? Going to go right after her? Going to marry her—generous man!—and give her her chance for happiness and life? Beautiful! But she'll see plenty of life right here at Maiangoa, don't you think? And as for happiness—"

"Stop!" cried Mayfield wildly. "Are you crazy with drugs, or are you telling me the truth?"

"I've known you were going for months, haven't I?" asked Herron. "Well, what did you suppose I was going to do? Stay here alone, and go jungle mad?"

"By Heaven, you're that now!"

"Not yet—not yet," mocked Herron; "nor going to be. Thoughtful of you to wish it, but I'm going to spoil your little plans. I wrote her. Last boat I got her answer. She'll be on the Mesurado."

"You wouldn't dare do as rotten a thing as that!"

Herron laughed.

"And she wouldn't come," Steve continued. "No girl would come—to this. It would be as good as suicide!"

"Listen," said Herron. "You don't suppose she knows what she's coming to, do you? Not unless she's learned on the way; and I gave pretty clear orders to Captain Mack. I think he'll have kept his mouth shut, all right. Five pounds over passage money if he has. Trust old Mack! He wouldn't lose twenty-five bucks. Did you think I was as big a fool as that? Not likely! I painted her a nice, idyllic picture of the sort of place Maiangoa was—waving palms and pretty coral beaches—little bungalow all vine-clad in a garden of tropical flowers—fine, high-minded natives—dear old missionary and his sweet-faced wife living just over the brow of the little hill by the house—all love and happiness in Arcady—beautiful! It brought the tears to my eyes while I was writing it. Oh, she's coming, all right! Sorry to dash your friendly little arrangement, Mayfield, but she's coming!"

"If I believed you—"

"Open the drawer on the right there," suggested Herron. "You'll find her last letter, I think."

Mayfield hesitated. Then, with a resolute movement, he opened the drawer. There was a letter there. He took it out, fingering it as if reluctant to look at it.

"You needn't be delicate. Read it!" urged Herron ironically.

With sudden decision, Steve took the letter from its envelope.

"Herron," he said, "if you've done this thing, knowing that she loved you—not you, but the man she thought you were—I think I'll kill you!"

"I'd have some say about that, wouldn't I? I've been keeping my eyes open for that little thing right along. Trust me! Besides, it's too late. A few weeks ago you might have got away with it. How easy to file a report of 'missing'! But you've lost your chance now. With the Mesurado already in the river, you'd be rather put to it to dispose of the remains, don't you think? Though, of course, if you've a taste for hanging—well," he drawled, rising, "hurry up. Read it and go. I've got to be at my toilet, for this is my wedding morning!"

One glance at the letter brought Steve a horrified conviction of the truth of Herron's words. The reaction to that convic-

tion was muscular and almost instantaneous. Herron hadn't time even to attempt to draw the gun that proved, later, to have been in his pocket. Mayfield's fist caught him squarely on the point of the jaw, and he was catapulted backward with terrific force, until he brought up against his bed and fell forward, striking the floor with a dull crash. He did not stir.

Suddenly Steve Mayfield's anger oozed away. It was not the time for anger, but for quick and cool action. Action? Well enough to say action, but what?

For an instant he had a wild notion of tying Herron hand and foot, carrying him out into the jungle, and leaving him there, under the guard of his servant. He would explain to Elsie Merritt that Paul was three weeks dead of the fever; and when the Mesurado had sailed, the servant could release the prisoner.

What, leave him ensconced in who knew what shrine in Elsie Merritt's heart? His death would wipe out his deceit and leave her her old ideal of Herron to cherish. Moreover, what was to hinder Herron from making a later resurrection? Perhaps he would reappear just in time to hoist Steve on the petard of his own lies.

No thoroughfare that way!

He noticed, as he stood there, that the rain had ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Only the drip from the bungalow and porch was to be heard. It was exceedingly still now—not a breath of air stirring. The rain had not cooled the atmosphere. A vile, sticky heat hung over the earth.

He became conscious of another sound—a faint, distant booming. The tom-toms of the natives were beating in barbaric rhythm. A feast or a funeral, a festival or a war, was perhaps impending. Black men were dancing out in that dripping, labyrinthine maze of vine and tree, on business that was no concern of the white man—no concern of Steve's, at any rate, for he was quitting this pesthole. Perhaps Herron knew what it was about, though.

The dull, measured thumping went on. It would probably go on all night—perhaps all the next day and night as well, for that matter. Steve reverted to his problem.

He couldn't kill Herron, couldn't even pretend that Herron was dead. It would be futile. There may also have been at the root of this decision his reluctance to lie to Elsie Merritt.

He heard a movement behind him, and

turned quickly. Herron had recovered consciousness, and was fumbling with his right hand at his pocket. A clairvoyant flash saved Steve, and he sprang upon Herron just in time to wrench the revolver from his hand.

"For safety's sake," he said grimly, "I'll keep this." He dropped it into his own pocket. "And I'll suggest that you'd better be careful. I *might* use it. I think I ought to!"

"But you won't," asserted Herron, struggling to his feet. "Oh, I knew that! You haven't the nerve."

"I'm not sure of that," said Steve. "I've a notion you *could* go to lengths sufficient to improve my nerve. If I knew—"

If he knew! There was the girl, a third and undetermined factor. Suddenly his diagnosis of her assailed him with doubts of its authenticity.

Suppose he were wrong? Suppose Herron could put it over? He was a black-guard and a brute and a coward, but that might not be evident to the girl at a glance. That he had grossly lied to her, of course, she would know—probably she knew it already. The mere sight of the muddy bar, the swollen yellow river, the water-soaked jungle, would tell her that. Maiangoa had no best foot to put forward. It was, immediately, its evil and unhealthy self. The green gardens, the waving palms, the house of the missionary—no, she would know he was a liar; and yet—would it alienate her?

Suppose Herron were clever enough, as he just was, to say:

"I was afraid to tell you the truth—afraid you'd never come—and I needed you so! I felt that without you I should go mad! Forgive me—forgive me—because I wanted you so!"

That was an appeal to shake a woman! With a girl like this it might succeed. Might? No, by Heaven, it *would*! Mayfield had a sickening conviction of it.

"If I knew what to do—"

Herron, realizing himself safe, declared insolently:

"You can't do anything. It's out of your hands!"

Mayfield did not heed him, but, coming suddenly from his abstraction, he went on:

"There is one thing I can do, and I'll do it—not for you, but for her. Rather than leave her here with you, even though she is willing to stay, I would kill you; but it needn't come to that. If, after she sees

you and has heard you excuse your damnable lies, she still cares for you, you can go home with her. I'll give you a letter that will get you a job—a better one than you deserve. She'll at least be in a civilized land, where she can get help if she wants it, and where you can have another chance—a chance to come back and be decent."

"What?"

"If she wants you."

"And you stay here?" demanded Herron incredulously.

"I'll stay until the next steamer, so as not to go with you. As far as the post is concerned, it can rot, for all of me; but I'll hold it down to release you, until the Intertropic sends another man next trip."

"You—fool!" said Herron queerly.

"No doubt. You accept?"

"Accept?" cried Herron.

Suddenly he began to shake. He broke into wild laughter, which ended in prolonged, unrestrained sobbing. He caught Mayfield's arm presently, and clung to it feverishly.

"You mean it? You really mean it?" he stammered. "My God, you do!" He sank on the bed, wringing his hands. "I—I need a bracer," he whispered.

IV

Just then the long, hoarse blast of the Mesurado's siren rent the air with a bellow like that of some monstrous antediluvian beast. Herron started as if he had been struck.

"I—I can't face her—yet," he whimpered. "For God's sake, Mayfield, hand me that bottle from the cupboard! I'm unstrung. Give me a little while—half an hour—to get myself into shape! Tell her I've been sick—something—anything. I'll be ready when you get back."

Mayfield hesitated an instant.

"Very well," he said. "I'll go."

"That bottle!" gasped Herron.

Theoretically, of course, the man was better off without it; but practically—Steve shook his head. Herron was all shot to pieces—the result of his debauch with the natives.

As Steve hesitated, Herron staggered to his cupboard and caught the bottle in a trembling grasp.

"Better take a big shot of quinine with it," Steve advised. "You'll need it."

"I—I know it," whimpered Herron, drawing the cork.

Taking Herron's gun from his pocket, and tossing it on the table, Steve Mayfield walked out, went down the bungalow steps, and turned to the river.

The misty darkness was closing down over the water. In another quarter of an hour it would be dark. The Mesurado, however, just at that moment put her nose around a point of banyans two hundred yards distant, quickly lost way, and for an instant drifted. Her anchor chains played out with a splash.

Steve Mayfield sprang into the boat moored at the compound wharf, and rowed across the intervening water. A moment later he climbed to the deck of the Mesurado. A girl came swiftly toward him from the bow, saying:

"Paul! Paul!"

And then, just as she reached him, she paused and said, with a sort of breathless and frightened surprise:

"Why, you aren't Paul!"

Her voice, her face, completed Steve Mayfield's undoing. She was exactly everything that he had imagined her to be. He shook his head.

"No—I'm Stephen Mayfield. Paul is ashore. He asked me to come for you."

"I don't understand," she said, searching his face. "This—this isn't what I thought I was coming to!"

"Paul will explain that," he said.

"Then he's not ill? He's here, and all right?"

"Yes."

The girl gave him a brave little smile of relief.

"I'm ready to go ashore now, Mr. Mayfield," she said.

"Good! Your baggage—we'll see to that to-morrow. In any case, you'll want to stay aboard to-night. Shall we go?"

As they crossed the water, and came up the incline to the compound, she asked no further questions. She seemed, indeed, to have determined that she would not do so; but her eyes were busy. Steve caught her glances of surprise, of dismay, of fear.

They came along the muddy path toward Herron's bungalow. From within, the reflector of a lamp cast a sharp beam into the darkness. Where was Herron? A vague uneasiness came over Mayfield. He called, as they neared the steps:

"Herron! Herron!"

And Herron appeared in the door. Steve uttered an exclamation. Like a flash, he

realized what had happened. Herron, shaken by drugs, by fatigue, by emotion, had had his bracer. Probably he had drained the bottle; and though ordinarily this might have had slight effect upon him, in his weakened condition it had promptly gone to his head.

He was maudlin drunk. He still held the bottle in his hand, and, waving it gayly, he cried:

"H'lo, my honey! H'lo, my dear! This is my wedding m-m-mahorning!"

He stepped gingerly across the porch, negotiated the first step, missed the second, and came headlong down, sprawling at their feet in the mud.

The girl shrank back against Mayfield, and, but for him, would have fallen. Steve felt her swaying in his arm, heard her moan under her breath. She found her voice at last, though it was but a whisper.

"Oh, I'm afraid!" she said. "I'm so afraid!"

"You need not be," said Steve gently.

"What is this terrible place?" she asked.

"And he—like that! Oh, I'm afraid! I want to go away from here. I never should have come. I—I didn't know! Please take me away! Help me!"

"I'll help you," said Steve. "We'll go aboard the ship at once. You'll be safe. To-morrow she sails. I'll tell you what has happened; but until then, remember—you're safe—safe with me. I'll let nothing touch you—nothing hurt you."

She looked at him, her lips trembling, a mist of tears swimming in her dark, sweet eyes. The light of Herron's lamp shone full upon Steve's face; and as the girl looked at him, her fright visibly diminished. He saw it, and smiled reassuringly.

"You're safe. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes," she said brokenly. "I—I do—believe you!"

When they reached the deck of the *Mesurado*, she gave a deep sigh, as if she had reached a haven. Turning in the darkness, she said:

"I don't quite understand yet. This is *Maiangoa*?"

"It is."

"It is so—so utterly different from what I expected. I expected—"

"I know—white sands, waving palms, flowers, and—I read your letter."

"You read it?"

"Yes—scarcely an hour ago. I didn't know, until then, that you were coming.

He told me. It was too late to warn you; but, believe me, I would have given anything to save you this!"

"Is he—often that way?"

Steve gave her the truth bluntly.

"He's often worse."

She shuddered.

"How strange and hard life is, isn't it?"

If one doesn't learn easily, it teaches one forcibly. I've been blind—blind. That isn't Paul Herron—not the Paul Herron that I knew. All the while I had misgivings about coming. Sometimes I wondered if, after all, I really loved him. You see, it had been so long, and only a few letters, far apart. I had misgivings, but I argued them away. I remembered him only as I had seen him on one unforgettable night. His letters, too—sometimes he wrote a beautiful letter."

Steve smiled grimly as he remembered Herron's words:

"It brought the tears to my eyes while I was writing it."

They were on the very tip of his tongue, but he suppressed them.

"I can't stay—I can't stay," the girl went on, in deep distress. "I never should have come! I didn't realize! What shall I do?"

"Go home," said Steve sternly. "It would be madness to stay. God knows it isn't treachery to say it, but bitter truth. It would be physical, moral, and spiritual death for you to stay here. Go home!"

"Are you going ashore now?"

"Yes."

"Then tell him, please, that I'll see him in the morning, but that he mustn't hope for—no! Just tell him that I'll see him."

"I'll tell him."

As he turned to go, he noticed that the monotonous thudding of the natives' drums was nearer—much nearer. Now they seemed to come from across the compound to the south, whereas earlier, they had come from the north.

"Listen!" he said.

Mysterious and terrifying, incessant, the rhythmic beat echoed through the jungle, across the black, glistening water. It was a voice from the primitive past, savage and cruel.

"That's *Maiangoa*," said Steve. "Brutal—ecene! Black men, only a step or two beyond the ape, beating their drums—hollow segments of trees covered with hides—and dancing their bestial ceremonies.

Festering forests, deadly fevers, unendurable heat, incomprehensible savagery—darkest Africa!”

She made a faint exclamation of horror.

“You never could stay there! But I’ve told Herron this—if, after you’ve seen him and talked with him, you find that you still—” He couldn’t quite bring himself to the words. “There’s a job waiting for him back home. There—”

He broke off.

Suddenly, at quick intervals, three shots sounded ashore. As if at a signal, the native drums for a moment stopped beating. It was as if the jungle’s heart had stopped beating, as if it lay, a black, formless, evil monster, dead—

For a little while the only sound was that of the swish of the river against the rusty sides of the Mesurado. Then a door opened, a lozenge of light appeared, and, framed in it, Captain Mack.

“Did you hear those shots?” he inquired. “What was it?”

“I don’t know,” replied Steve.

“I don’t like it,” declared the captain. “The sound of those cursed drums—hello, they’ve stopped!”

“I think I’d better go ashore,” said Steve. “Herron’s been bothering the natives—influencing them against the witch doctors. It may be nothing, but I think I’d better go ashore.”

Captain Mack nodded.

“All right—maybe you’d better. I think I’ll send half a dozen men with you, though. You don’t suppose— Wait a minute! I’ll go along.”

V

The lamp in Herron’s bungalow was still alight, sending its unflickering radiance into the darkness. Ten feet from the house, they stumbled over a form—Herron’s servant, quite dead, a bullet wound in his head. On the steps sprawled a second body, grotesquely daubed with clay paint, masked, garishly decorated with plumage and grasses, its neck hung with the useless amulets of the witch doctor.

Across the threshold lay Herron, his chest transfixed by a long, barbed spear.

The tale was complete. Herron’s warfare with the witch doctors was forever at an end, and the evil gods of the black men again ruled the tribes.

“I don’t like it!” muttered Captain Mack.

Steve Mayfield stepped into the bungalow. On the table lay the battered photograph of Elsie Merritt. He picked it up, buttoned it in his pocket, and turned to the door.

“I don’t like it!” reiterated Captain Mack. “You’ve a bit of cargo here, you say?”

“Very little.”

“I had a message for him,” said the captain, nodding toward Herron. “Better read it.”

The message ran:

Intertropic Trading Company insolvent. No further salary. Advise abandon post at Maiangoa.

“Now it’s like this,” said the captain. “The Intertropic isn’t anything to me, nor its dinky cargo here, nor any of its confounded creditors, either; but my ship is. What I say is, get your stuff together—just your personal belongings—and get aboard. We’ll bury Herron under the house, and fire it. I’d rather take a chance with the bar than with these cursed natives. They’ve had a taste of blood, and it makes them wild. Listen!”

Again the jungle heart had begun its beating—boom, boom, boom, boom. Again the beating was remote, lost in unguessed black depths of the forest; yet who could say what swift and silent death lurked in the shadows just beyond the compound?

“I don’t like it!” said Captain Mack, for the fourth time. “I’ll take my ship out of here. Come!”

At dawn the Mesurado was at sea. The land was a mere dark smudge on the horizon. Maiangoa was a vivid, evil dream, remembered, but already fast dimming for Stephen Mayfield.

For Elsie Merritt—she was looking at Steve.

“It all seems unreal, as if it had been some one else, not I, who had passed through it. I can’t help feeling that I have been found lacking in some way. Love should dare all, bear all; and I—it seems to prove that I—”

“It only proves,” said Steve softly, “that love is yet to come!”

“Ah, you think so? I wonder!”

“I know,” said Steve.

And though he could say no more then, he faced the sun, rising over the fading smudge of Maiangoa, and greeted it as if it were the dawning of a new life.

The Token

THE STORY OF A STRANGE INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY

By Louis Tracy

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The House of Peril," etc.

THE English police are investigating what seems to be an extensive conspiracy engineered by foreigners in England, for purposes which are more or less of a mystery. The Hon. Peggy Mainwaring—daughter of Lord Copmanthorpe, a cabinet minister—and her maid, Monica Jackson, have become involved in the affair through happening to pick up a curiously mutilated coin—a half crown punched with dagger-shaped marks forming the Roman numeral "IV." The losers of this coin, or token, are apparently determined to recover it, for Monica is kidnaped from Lord Copmanthorpe's residence on Curzon Street, in London, and taken to a secluded house near Dorking, in Surrey. The police surround this place, and liberate Monica, though the house is fired by a bomb and its inmates escape through a tunnel. It appears that the place was bought some time before by a Frenchman calling himself Jules Lefèvre.

The police officers playing leading parts in the investigation are Superintendent Winter and Detective Inspector Furneaux, of Scotland Yard, and Superintendent MacDermott and Sergeant Linton, of the Surrey County Constabulary. Sergeant Linton has entered the police after holding a commission in the army during the war. He is evidently much interested in Miss Mainwaring, of whose social status he is unaware, knowing her only as a companion of Monica Jackson, and supposing her to be a fellow servant of some sort. She already has a suitor of her own class—Lord Robert Ferris, an officer in the Guards.

Later developments include the discovery of a second half crown, similarly marked with a number, on a man arrested in London for distributing a dangerous narcotic, and the finding of still another of these mysterious tokens on an Italian, Pietro Ruffini, who is held at Superintendent MacDermott's headquarters, in Dorking.

XIII

LINTON darted a quick look at Furneaux when the latter spoke of the marks on a half crown which had presumably been found on the prisoner when his pockets were searched thoroughly in the charge room.

"Yes," said the detective. "You were right in guessing that those marks represented a number. Miss Mainwaring supplied us with No. 4 yesterday at Box Hill. This fellow possessed No. 24. We have another joker in Bow Street who was intrusted with No. 57. Quite a large organization, it would appear!"

A constable knocked, and entered.

"A gentleman outside, who says he is Lord Robert Ferris, wants to see Miss Mainwaring, sir," he said to MacDermott.

"Lord Robert Ferris! Is he a Guards officer?" cried Linton involuntarily.

"Yes. Do you know him?" snapped Furneaux.

"Quite well."

"Then don't meet him just yet. I'll soon settle his hash!"

The little detective hurried out of the office.

"Why should Mr. Furneaux want to settle Bobby Ferris's hash?" inquired Linton, looking at Winter in genuine amazement.

"If I were to hazard a guess," said the chief, affecting a ponderous style of speech which gave him time to think, "it would be that his lordship is a friend of the Copmanthorpes, who are naturally anxious to know why various members of their household should be in such request in the neighborhood of Dorking. At present, however, in so far as our worst suspicions go, we wish to keep cabinet ministers as much in the dark as the general public."

"But Ferris and I are old friends," said Linton. "I could put things right with him in a minute."

"I rather believe that Mr. Furneaux is now mystifying Lord Robert still further."

Copyright, 1923, by Louis Tracy—This story began in the January number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

Winter's dry tone revealed more than the mere words. "I make it a rule not to interfere when he acts so decisively. He always has a reason, and it is generally a sound one. What is bothering me at the moment is not Lord Robert Ferris's unexpected presence, but why Pietro Ruffini should deem it necessary to carry a pistol and dagger when he cycles into Dorking on an apparently innocent errand. Who and what is Mr. Thistleton, MacDermott?"

"A highly respected resident in the district," said the superintendent. "He is what is known as a bankers' stockbroker. I would as soon suspect an archbishop of complicity in this affair as an elderly financial man of his type."

"Will you send an intelligent constable to Mr. Thistleton's house to explain that Ruffini is under arrest, and that the police want to receive and answer any telephonic inquiry which may be made for him there during this afternoon and evening? Of course, your man should remain on duty until, say, ten o'clock, and make a careful record if anything turns up, including telegrams and letters. Are your local magistrates to be trusted? Will they remand Ruffini for a week in custody without seeking too full an explanation?"

"They are models of discretion," laughed MacDermott.

"Well—it may be an empty dream—didn't some one hint about luncheon being ready?"

"It's on the table."

But the telephone intervened. It was Mr. Sheldon, speaking from Scotland Yard. Furneaux had not erred when he assumed that Margherita Dubois had hurried away from the Soho restaurant after hearing from Ruffini. Neither the proprietor nor any of the waiters had ever set eyes on her before. They regarded her as an ordinary customer who had made an appointment with a friend for a meal in their establishment.

Sheldon added that he did not expect to receive a reply from Paris for another hour, at least.

"That's all right," said the chief. "You go and eat now, which is what I intend doing. I shall be in the Yard about five o'clock. Have four of our foreign squad ready for a conference. Shelve everything else. This affair is of the highest importance. Tell Sir Arthur I'll be glad if he, too, can arrange to be free then for an hour."

This reference to the chief commissioner showed how serious was Winter's view of matters. Evidently, he was determined that the resources of the Criminal Investigation Department should be placed at his disposal without stint or reserve.

In the flurry of the moment Mr. MacDermott forgot to invite Linton to join the luncheon party, so the latter, scrupulous in the observation of discipline, was left in the room when the others went out. Undecided whether to go at once to his own quarters for a hasty meal, he looked through a window into the street, and was far more annoyed than he cared to confess even to his inner consciousness at seeing Miss Margaret Mainwaring being escorted by Furneaux from the private door of Mr. MacDermott's house to a limousine drawn up behind the detectives' car.

Ferris—whom, of course, Linton recognized instantly—seemed to be surprised by the haste with which the girl and himself were hustled into the vehicle, which set off at once down the London road. Furneaux looked after them, and grinned. Then, since those beady eyes missed nothing, he caught sight of Linton's frowning stare above the wire blind of the superintendent's office window. His expression changed into one of deep concern. He said, quite plainly, without uttering a word:

"Well, well! What's gone wrong now?"

In half a minute he was back in the room.

"Why are you alone?" he cried.

"Mr. MacDermott has taken Mr. Winter to lunch, but—"

"He meant to ask you, of course. He took it for granted you would come."

"Possibly. But—"

"That ass, Ferris, couldn't leave well enough alone. He insisted on escorting Miss Mainwaring back to London, so a very angry young lady had to go with him. If it is any consolation, you may be sure that at this moment Miss Mainwaring regards Lord Robert Ferris with a dislike almost amounting to aversion."

Linton was beginning to feel wary of Furneaux's conversational openings. He tried to laugh.

"That will be a new sensation for Bobby, who is a bit of a dog with the fair sex," he said. "However, I am mainly concerned about Miss Mainwaring. No doubt she was looking forward to hearing a fresh budget of news during luncheon."

"She won't have to wait long," came the careless comment. "She has promised to dine with you and me at eight. Ah, here comes MacDermott, to inquire what the devil is detaining us!"

And, indeed, the worthy superintendent did arrive by the private passage leading from his residence.

"What the devil is keeping you fellows?" he inquired.

Linton had to bite his lower lip hard to choke back a laugh, but Furneaux only muttered that there must be something radically wrong with the whole tribe of common or garden dukes, as their sons were often such frightful asses. At any rate, Linton thought fit not to seek more precise information about the detective's wholly unexpected arrangement for the evening. He had yet to learn that the Yard required his presence in London for an indefinite period.

The all-absorbing topic of the hour was dropped completely during the meal. A casual reference told Linton that Miss Mainwaring had been allowed only a peep at Monica, who was ready to relapse into pronounced hysteria if her nerves were not soothed by frequent doses of bromide. After that, the talk between MacDermott and the detective dealt largely with past experiences.

For instance, it was instructive for a novice in criminology to learn that a highly expert and most daring burglar, who had been run to earth in the Dorking district some years before the war, narrowly escaped being shot for abject cowardice in the front line. He was saved by a sensible medical board, which certified that he was suffering from some abnormal form of neurasthenia. Drafted into a naval dockyard, he picked up some real knowledge of under-sea sound detectors, suggested a remarkably ingenious improvement in those novel and highly technical devices, and cheerfully spent the remainder of his war service in a destroyer, listening for enemy submarines—than which few more nerve-racking occupations can be named.

"It's odd," put in MacDermott, "but we used his jimmy to break open that window last night."

"He is now an excellent locksmith, and much valued by his employers, a firm of safe manufacturers," said Winter. "I saw him the other day, and he told me he had applied for a job on the new mystery ship,

but I dissuaded him from taking it if offered, as he is over fifty, and ought to settle down into staid citizenship."

"Oh, was *that* it?" snapped Furneaux.

Winter almost blushed. He tried to concentrate on the proper dissection of a chicken's leg, but could not ignore the wrath in his colleague's eyes.

"Yes," he said. "I'll admit it now. You remember the theft of Lady Burgand's jewels, Mac—how a specially devised lock was picked and the safe locked again, just as if some one had the key and knew the combination. Well, I spoke of the affair to our friend, and he, in genuine admiration, blurted out the remark that he thought there were only two men living who could open that lock by listening to the tumbling of the wards. He, of course, was one. I guessed at the other, and, by jing, we got him with the goods!"

"And for a whole week you crowed over me because you had pulled off what you chose to describe as a perfect example of inductive reasoning," complained Furneaux bitterly.

"Well, well, Frog, I meant to tell you some time. I know you hate any one to encroach on your own special method of first finding out what happened, and then pretending you had sensed the whole thing from the beginning."

"You're a comical pair," laughed MacDermott. "It beats me how you've survived a series of stolid chief commissioners. The average county chief constable would die of apoplexy if his detective department conducted police inquiries in your amazing way. As a case in point, I literally wouldn't have dared to blow up that tunnel this morning. I heard the crack, and imagined you had all gone to glory."

"We only escaped by a miracle," said Winter.

MacDermott took thought. He remembered now that the chief of the C. I. D. had glossed over the exact cause of the second explosion in his statement to the press. In fact, Winter was not at all sure what casualties, if any, had resulted.

Linton kept his eyes glued on his section of a fowl. He reflected that things might not always be what they seem, even in the archives of Scotland Yard.

He was asked to pack a bag with sufficient equipment for a week. While he was gone, MacDermott was enlightened as to the identity of Miss Mainwaring. The

superintendent opened his eyes widely at this discovery, but Winter, who told him, insisted on the necessity of absolute reticence on that particular point.

"You see," he said, "if once the social position of one of the two girls who met *mon vieux* and his fellow scoundrel outside the King's Head at Box Hill becomes public property, this affair will attain an undesirable notoriety. Even our young friend Linton doesn't know yet that she is other than a superior housemaid in Curzon Street."

"Does she know anything about him?" asked MacDermott.

"I think not. We have kept strictly to business."

"He's a bright fellow. I wonder he hasn't looked up Lord Copmanthorpe in 'Who's Who' or 'Debrett.'"

"Have you?" put in Furneaux.

"A fair hit! But I have been too busy."

"At present we want to avoid complications," went on Furneaux. "Captain Linton dare not flirt with a housemaid, no matter how pretty she may be, and the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring cannot possibly look soulfully into the eyes of a police sergeant."

"Inspector, now," announced MacDermott. "He is in orders to-day—specially promoted."

"Have you told him?" inquired Winter.

"Not yet."

"Well, break the glad tidings when we're in the car. It's high time we were moving."

MacDermott thought he was scoring rather neatly when he said to Linton, a few minutes later:

"By the way, inspector, when the opportunity offers, you might send your uniform into store. Our outfitters have your measurements, and will have your new clothes ready within a few days."

"Have I been promoted, sir?" said Linton quietly. "If so, I have you to thank for it, and I am exceedingly obliged to you."

"You are also recommended for the merit badge," the older man went on. "Possibly that doesn't sound much in your ears, but the ordinary police constable thinks a lot of it, for he knows it has to be earned by real good work."

"I am beginning to realize that side of life in the police," was the modest answer. "A soldier has to take chances in war which, until the past few years, might never come his way at all; but the average police-

man may be called on to risk his life at any moment of his thirty years of service, and he never can know what odds he has to face. I assure you, no matter what the future may have in store for me personally, I shall always look back on my experiences here with a lively gratitude to my comrades. They are splendid fellows, every man of them."

"Don't forget to give full play to those admirable sentiments when you're a chief constable," chirped Furneaux.

XIV

ACTING on instructions, Linton effaced himself during the press inspection of the ruins of Avenue House, and took care not to figure in any of the photographs for publication. He noticed that Furneaux paid slight heed to the charred chaos within the four walls, but prowled about the out-buildings, and examined every inch of the Ford car standing in the garage, which, as a building, though badly scorched by heat and shaken by air concussion, was fairly intact in other respects.

The reporters, naturally, were mainly interested in the ruined house and in the exciting story told by MacDermott. They were gathered around him and Winter on the lawn when Furneaux crooked a finger at Linton, and led him to the garage.

"Do you understand the mechanism of the internal combustion engine?" he almost whispered, when the two were inside the shed.

"Yes."

"Well, have a peep at the transmission gear. There's a candle. I suppose it is safe enough. Anyhow, I've taken a chance with it already. Don't touch a thing—just look. The inspection pit is quite roomy—big enough for a much larger car, in fact—so you need not soil your clothes."

Linton obeyed without another word. He had been in the pit only a few seconds when he whistled softly, and thrust his head and shoulders higher within the framework of the chassis.

"Can you hear?" he said in a curiously muffled voice. His position, plus the unusual acoustic properties of a sunken rectangle, affected his ordinarily clear and incisive utterance.

"Perfectly," replied Furneaux.

"There is a thing like a bomb here, adjusted in such a way that any movement of the differential will upset it."

"So I thought. Tell me, how could it be detonated?"

"Almost certainly by being turned upon its side, and then set off either by a weighted striker, or, more probably, by the action of some corrosive acid liberated from a tube. The latter method would be nearly infallible."

"Is there much risk in removing it?"

"None, I think. Some one had to fix it, you know. There's a perch actually provided. Anyhow"—the hollow voice ceased for a couple of seconds—"here it is!"

Furneaux, bending, with hands on knees, saw the younger man stooping on the floor of the pit, and holding in his right hand a sinister looking object, fashioned of dull-colored metal, globular in shape, but slightly flattened at the south pole to form a base, and with a screw cap at the north pole.

"Shall I draw the sting?" inquired Linton coolly.

"If you can do so without killing the pair of us."

"Oh, yes—I can promise that. The infernal thing had to be put in order, and the reverse action should be safe enough. But—"

"You want me to hold the candle. Give it to me."

Now both men knew that Linton was not going to mention the candle, which he could have set on a shelf in the pit. He was about to suggest that Furneaux might go outside until called back.

"Really—" he began.

"Winter will be both surprised and distressed if both of us are blown to smithereens," cackled Furneaux; "but, whatever I might have done a minute ago, I certainly must hold that candle now!"

Linton made no further protest. While his companion showed a light, he unscrewed the metal cap and lifted it out carefully. Attached to it by thin wire was a half-inch cylinder of glass, three parts filled with a brown liquid.

"There you are," cried Linton gleefully. "That's a corrosive sublimate, which, when spilled on the chemical compound forming its opposite number, sets up sufficient heat to affect the detonator. Nearly all the high explosives have to be detonated by fulminate of mercury."

"Pass 'em up separately," said Furneaux, "and take another squint at the machinery. Those babies left nothing to

chance, and they may have provided a second little joker in case the first one failed."

After further examination, Linton reported all clear, and, in the bright light of a window, the two scrutinized the bomb more closely. It was a well made article. The glass tube had fitted loosely into a cylindrical chamber penetrating nearly one-third of the missile's diameter. It had been surrounded by some whitish gray crystals, which now lay at the bottom.

"If you have an envelope in your pocket, we'll shake those boys out," said Linton. "I believe this bit of frightfulness is of the incendiary variety, and I am not familiar with the actual method of construction."

Furneaux considered.

"Will there be any danger, then, in taking it with us to town?"

"I believe not."

"Quite sure?"

"No—I can't vouch for it. You see for yourself how it works, but I cannot be certain that concussion brought about by an accidental fall might not do the trick."

"Well, here is the envelope for your crystals. Then we'll contrive the accidental fall, to test the thing. If possible, I want the whole apparatus to be in the hands of the Home Office experts to-night."

Furneaux wasted no time over such matters. It was easy to arrange a loose plank so that the bomb would roll into the pit when the plank was moved. If an explosion followed, it could hardly injure persons cowering outside the shed.

The heavy cylinder dropped with a thud, and there were no ill results.

"And now," said Linton, "all we want is a cork for the glass tube."

"Oh, you'll find that in the cupboard where the chauffeur keeps his sparking plugs and other small accessories. I didn't like either its smell or its appearance, and I wondered what had become of the bottle it fitted. That is one reason why I searched so carefully."

A piece of sacking concealed the bomb from other eyes when Linton carried it to the car and placed it beneath the seat. By now the photographers were busy, and MacDermott was giving instructions to the police guard. It was evident that neither Winter nor Furneaux would attempt any detailed scrutiny of the debris until it had been sifted by workmen. Indeed, the local officials undertook to note the place where each recognizable scrap of metal was found

—a task rendered easy by the fact that a builder in the locality had made certain alterations in the cellars to the order of M. Lefèvre, it being understood that the benevolent scientist wanted to experiment in flower and fruit culture by artificial light and heat.

The chief knew nothing of the latest infernal machine until the car was running swiftly along the London road. Then Furneaux told him where it was reposing. Winter had cut the end off a fresh Havana, and was about to apply a match—which, however, he blew out.

"What sort of bomb is it?" he inquired, in a smoothly mellifluous tone which his colleague understood and was delighted at. "I mean, is it to be fired by a fuse or by contact?"

"Neither. Inspector Linton tells me it is of a variety which bursts by merely rolling over—on the lines of a certain type of chemical fire extinguisher."

Winter struck another match, and lighted the cigar.

"I hope you are sitting on it," he said.

"You must learn to control your face," Furneaux said sharply to Linton. "You defeat my best efforts when you start grinning like a Cheshire cat!"

"Suppose you tell me what really happened," said Winter.

The little man cackled shrilly.

"Am I an inspired idiot?" he demanded.

"Am I the champion humbug of all the ages? We are not dealing with criminals, but with lunatics. This fellow—Lefèvre, shall we call him?—is not a crook, but a scientific crank, a monomaniac driven out of his senses by a bright vision of some Utopian state which he alone is destined to establish. When we corner him, if we ever do, he will rail at us as the minions of an effete and tyrannical political system. In his eyes we are a pest of green flies eating into the heart of the socialistic rose, and must be removed by the drastic means beloved of gardeners. Do you think he was joking when he spoke to that builder of growing flowers and fruit by artificial light and heat? Not he! It was a serious figure of speech. He means to destroy that he may create anew. The phoenix of his dreams shall rise beautiful and flawless from our ashes. I tell you now that Jules Lefèvre is the most dangerous and highly developed force existing to-day in any separate corporeal entity. We must look for

him among the great ones, the thinkers. He simply cannot have reached eminence without leaving a blazed trail of successful achievement. If, to-night, there were held simultaneously gatherings of the most notable jailbirds of Europe and America and the men most distinguished in scientific research, I would expect to find him among the latter, *primus inter pares*."

"Hobnobbing with the president of the British Association, and discussing the vagaries of stellar light with the astronomer royal, in fact?"

"Yes—I mean that very thing."

"He has peculiar friends—Pietro Ruffini, for instance, an Italian ruffian, with pistol and dagger, all complete."

"And a gardener—a mere implement in the new weeding and tilling of humanity."

"Perhaps you're right," conceded Winter. "In any case, I'll follow the worms, such as Ruffini and his like, while you lurk in the library and smoking room of the Royal Society."

Linton listened to this remarkable discussion without daring to take part in it. Were it not for the accumulated proofs of the professional acumen of these two strangely constituted detectives, he might have thought they were raving. As it was, he tried to follow their lines of reasoning. His expression was so grave that Winter smiled broadly.

"Well, young man," he said, "what do you think of us now?"

"I think you are right," came the prompt answer.

"Which of us?"

"Both."

XV

THE commissioner of police, Sir Arthur Monson, made it convenient to attend the conference summoned by Mr. Winter. It was the height of the London season, and he had a rather pressing social engagement, but that went by the board, for, strange to relate, chief commissioners can be just as much interested in their duties as the youngest detective in the C. I. D.

Nine men gathered in Mr. Winter's office, a room on the third floor of New Scotland Yard. Its two windows gave a fine view of the Thames, backed by the curved front of the London County Council offices, with Westminster Bridge and St. Thomas's Hospital on the right, and, as if some utilitarian imp wished to spoil a

beautiful picture, the gaunt ugliness of Hungerford Bridge on the left.

But the far-flung vista of South London revealed by the rays of the setting sun did not draw the glance of any man in that company. Sir Arthur, who had obtained from Inspector Sheldon a fairly comprehensive sketch of the incidents already recorded, greeted Winter and Furneaux with genuine friendliness. He shook hands with Linton, saying that he had met his father, the general, and was well acquainted with Colonel Hollies, his mother's brother, chief constable of the county of which, it was expected, Linton himself would take charge, within a year, as head of the police. He nodded affably to the four members of the foreign squad.

Sheldon came in with him. Soon they were all seated around a large office desk. Mr. Winter occupied his accustomed chair, and the commissioner sat next to him. The others arranged themselves in no particular order.

Winter plunged into the case without preamble. For the benefit of the new men who would assist him henceforth in this special investigation, he reviewed all its circumstances from the outset. His exposition was listened to by an intent audience. Sir Arthur lifted inquiring eyebrows when Miss Margaret Mainwaring's name was mentioned in connection with Lord Copmanthorpe's London residence, but a long familiarity with the methods of his two most trusted aids kept him from breaking in with the obvious question.

Winter's statement occupied fully half an hour. It was given without notes, and with a lucidity which would have won the commendation of a King's Bench judge. Not a fact was omitted, not a name forgotten. Linton, who had been minded not so long since to cavil at the curiously airy and detached methods adopted by both Winter and Furneaux, realized at last that the chief was a man of great intellectual power, while his eccentric subordinate was endowed with an intuition which would be uncanny if it were not the outcome of genius governed by long experience.

Photographs of half crowns Nos. 4 and 57 were handed around. The marks on the latter seemed to have been made by the instrument used to deface the coin which Peggy Mainwaring discovered. There was the same brutal intent in the direction of the cuts. On comparing the two the sig-

nificance of the incised numerals became self-evident.

The commissioner held both photographs side by side in a strong light.

"Sometimes," he said, "I find myself fighting against Mr. Furneaux's psychological theories, but one has to admit a sense of horror, a sort of mesmeric fascination, in these so-called tokens. The mere use of such a word for such a symbol is adroit. And, if fifty-seven have been issued, we have to deal with a widespread organization. What can I do to help, Mr. Winter?"

"I need not ask for your support, sir, since you regard this matter so seriously, but I shall be glad if you will see the permanent under secretary at the Home Office to-morrow, and convince him of the extent and significance of this new menace."

"What, exactly, is the danger you fear?"

"It is twofold. There is a secret movement against the national life, as we know it, and I am looking, at any moment, for a direct attack on ministers of the crown, if not on the crown itself."

"Of course, you will receive all the assistance you need. I think that those now present should devote themselves exclusively to the running down of this gang, and especially of its leader. I must relieve you of other anxieties. You need not be concerned as to the safety of the members of the royal family or the cabinet. Our special preventive measures will be adopted at once. Mr. Furneaux, this should be a chase after your own heart."

"It appeals, sir, it appeals," agreed Furneaux. "It has novel features. Twice, this morning, we narrowly escaped being blown to Kingdom Come. Inspector Linton has had three chances, not to mention the poison gas and Ruffini's revolver. Such incidental episodes elevate sordid crime into Greek tragedy."

The commissioner did not avail himself of this opening into the realms of the higher criticism.

"Certain aspects of the affair strike me as peculiar," he went on. "For instance, assuming you are right as to Monica Jackson being terrorized by a snake, are we to believe that Lefèvre actually kept a snake in readiness for just such a purpose?"

"Mr. Winter and I have already discussed that point. We are prepared to find that a snake was purchased from some naturalist's shop about seven or eight o'clock last evening."

"That is an excellent line. And then the bomb in the car—do you regard that as a precaution taken regularly each night?"

"It must have been so. MacDermott is sure that no one could have slipped out to the garage, adjusted the bomb, and got back again to the house before the poison gas, high explosive, and fire rendered retreat to the tunnel impossible."

The chief's telephone rang. Every one except Linton knew that the call probably concerned the business in hand, since the operator would put no other through unless the matter were vitally important.

It was the Prefecture of Police in Paris speaking. Inquiry at the Maison Marnier, Rue Blanche, had revealed that the lady's costume, No. 17,008, had been sold out of the window as a stock model. The name of the buyer was unknown, the transaction being for cash; but, as it happened, the shop assistant who made the sale remembered the woman quite well, and was sure she could recognize her again, because certain alterations were necessary, and *madame* had a peculiar mark on her left shoulder blade—a queer mark. The prefecture had forgotten the English phrase, and Winter did not understand the French one.

"*Un moment, s'il vous plait!*" he said, covering the receiver with his hand. "What in the world is *un signe croissant?*"

"It means a crescent-shaped mole," said Furneaux.

Then the chief had to enlighten Paris, and reddened under the consciousness that all ears were alert to check his explanatory French. Nevertheless, he emerged triumphantly from the ordeal.

"The dress was purchased last November," he told the others when the call was ended. "The prefecture believes that the name Jules Lefèvre is an assumed one, being that of a famous French painter, though minus the letter 'b.' A notorious German agent, named Erminia Schwartz, has a mark which corresponds with that on the shoulder of the purchaser of the dress. If ours is the same woman, Paris wants her badly. Evidently you gave them some details, Sheldon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Quite right! They offer help, and will be glad to examine a few of the pills we found on that fellow now in Bow Street. Is the analysis in yet?"

"It reached us this afternoon, but it is

only a preliminary report. The Home Office laboratory regards it as a new preparation, mostly synthetic, and certain rather uncommon experimental tests must be made before the constituents can be stated accurately. They believe they already possess certain information which fits in with this case."

The commissioner rose with a smile.

"This must be the new war which every one is talking about," he said. "All that is lacking in the enemy's equipment is an airship and a few fast planes. I think we ought to endeavor to meet daily at ten and five o'clock. I want to keep in personal touch with this business."

During the next hour, Linton, a novice in all that concerned the work of the Criminal Investigation Department, was initiated into its remarkably businesslike system. He heard detectives voicing their knowledge of the international underworld—its leaders, their ways, their dupes, and their meeting places. He was astounded by some of the names mentioned—those of people whom he had regarded hitherto as amiable faddists, and by no means likely to be the associates of dangerous degenerates. The famous hotels, night clubs, and cafés which one set or another used as common ground for their attack on social order were so numerous that the mere recital took his breath away.

The telephone—often two instruments at once—was busy enough now. Instructions were given to divisional headquarters, and arrangements made to round up or shadow certain suspects, or for local detectives to accompany men from Scotland Yard to some noted rendezvous at a fixed hour, on the ground that "Maréchal and Corsini play chess there every night at nine," or "Ruby Montagu is dancing instructress there," or "the doctor seldom shows up till half past ten."

Furneaux broke in when "the doctor" was spoken of.

"That chap is no doctor, but an analytical chemist, isn't he?" he inquired.

"Yes," said the man.

He had mentioned a noted drug purveyor, whose boast was that the authorities could never bring a definite charge against him.

"Watch him closely to-night—all night, if you can keep on his track without alarming him. I know he deals only through intermediaries, but it will be useful if you

can get some of the stuff he supplies. No arrest, of course."

"By the way, Sheldon, are those half crowns ready?" said Winter.

"Yes, sir. Here are seven, all marked 'No. 8.' I used counterfeit half crowns. They resemble the real thing perfectly."

This raised a laugh. Sheldon was by way of being partly Scottish, so perhaps he could not bear the defacing of genuine coins.

Linton was almost thrilled at finding a number of "tokens" distributed. He gathered that they would be produced at the proper moment if a guarantee of good faith were demanded by some cautious but nearly hoodwinked rascal. He did not receive one, from which fact he deduced that his immediate cue was to listen and say nothing.

At twenty minutes to eight Furneaux sprang up and called him from the gathering. Winter merely nodded when the little man left the room.

"I'll be with you as soon as possible," he said.

Furneaux hurried his companion into a taxi, and gave the address of an Italian restaurant in Dean Street.

"Soho is no place in which to keep a lady waiting," he explained; "but Miss Mainwaring promised not to arrive before eight, and you can spruce up a bit while I mount guard at the door."

"I'll be good, and do as I'm told," smiled Linton; "but there is one question I'm dying to put."

"Well, don't die just yet."

"What part do I play in this quest?"

"Aren't you satisfied, Linton? You have had nearly all the fat in the production thus far—that is, if you understand stage slang."

"Quite so, but I couldn't help noticing that I was completely left out of your plans at headquarters."

"For the very good reason that we have no plans. We must hook a bigger fish than Ruffini before we begin to think of laying Lefèvre by the heels. That is where you come in. You have actually seen the man and two of his friends. That is a tremendous asset. Also you have heard him speak—"

"So has Miss Mainwaring."

"You have a most annoying trick of interruption! Can't you take your mind off that girl for ten consecutive seconds?

Your eyes gleamed every time the chief mentioned her. Now, not a word about Lord Robert Ferris. If she finds out that you are a friend of his, she'll be scared to death."

This tirade amused Linton, but he ignored the greater part of it.

"I don't agree with you," he said quietly. "Miss Mainwaring is not the sort of young female who goes in at the deep end about a rattlepate like Bobby Ferris; but there must be some member of the Copmanthorpe household in whom he is interested. I cannot imagine him having much in common with a solemn person like a cabinet minister."

He did not catch the scrutinizing glance Furneaux threw at him. They were crossing Trafalgar Square close to King Charles's statue, and a Victoria bus nearly collided with the taxi. Language followed, brief, lurid, and much to the point. Each driver formed a rapid and most unfavorable judgment of the other, and said so. A traffic policeman wanted to join in the discussion, but faded away at a wink from Furneaux; and there was no further talk about Lord Robert Ferris or the Copmanthorpe household.

XVI

MISS MAINWARING was delayed, though Furneaux was sure she would arrive promptly at eight. Linton, however, directed by Signor Pucci, the enormously stout proprietor of the Ristorante Milano, was washed and combed, and back at the front door of the restaurant again, before Miss Mainwaring's taxi drew up at the curb.

A tall young man alighted first, and held the door open for her.

"And, pray, whom have we here?" said Furneaux vexedly.

"Mr. Frederick Blenkey, of Ewell," murmured Linton in his ear.

"Ah, those infernal newspapers again!" growled the detective.

Of course, Fred had read of his Monica's plight, and had caught the next train to London. He was so deeply distressed that Peggy thought it advisable to bring him with her, as she did not know how much or how little to tell him. She explained this breathlessly after paying off the taxi driver.

"Monica is in good hands, and will be in the pink after a few days' rest," an-

nounced Furneaux confidently. "What are you, Blenkey?"

"I'm with my father in a small market garden, sir," came the answer.

"Would you know those two fellows again—the two who made a fuss about losing a half crown on Box Hill yesterday?"

"Know 'em? I'd know 'em better than their mothers would after I was through with them, if I got half a chance!" vowed Fred.

"Can you be spared from the market garden for a day or two, if your expenses are paid?"

"Yes, sir; but mayn't I see Monica?"

"No, you may not, until the end of the week. Report at Scotland Yard to-morrow morning at a quarter to ten, and bring a bag. Now, don't loiter here another moment, there's a good chap. There are too many sharp eyes in this neighborhood."

Fred lifted his hat, and was evidently about to bid the Hon. Peggy a respectful farewell, but Furneaux hissed:

"No names!"

So he made off, though not without a puzzled look at Linton. He could not guess that this half recognition was a point in his favor.

Furneaux hustled his guests upstairs to a room on the first floor.

"Blenkey may earn his keep," he confided to them. "Now, inspector, when the waiter comes—a fellow all white apron, bushy eyebrows, and black hair—tell him to stage three Martinis, and to have dinner ready for four in fifteen minutes. I am not ordering a cocktail for you, Miss Mainwaring, but I hope you will take a glass of Pucci's three-star Chianti. He gets it direct from Florence. Our blushing inspector will entertain you while I remove the dust of Surrey and the grime of London. Mr. Winter will be with us soon."

The two young people were left gazing at each other. Linton, being expressly forbidden to discuss the one topic in which he was most interested, essayed valiantly to avoid it.

"Our diminutive friend packs a lot into a few words," he said.

"Yes," pouted Peggy. "He says anything he wants to say himself, but tells everybody else they mustn't dare open their mouths."

This remark had such a curious aptness that Linton was hard put to it to conceal his surprise.

"Please don't do him an injustice," he said. "It was not his fault that you were carried off before luncheon to-day."

"I know that quite well," she said, unpinning a hat with a hanging veil. "That stupid person, Lord Robert Ferris, not only chases after me to Dorking, but gets me called to Scotland by to-morrow morning's train from King's Cross."

Linton was suddenly aware of a sharp pang of disappointment.

"That is too bad," was all he could find to say.

Quite unaware of what he was doing, he allowed his eyes to dwell rather fixedly on Peggy's wealth of brown hair.

"What's the matter?" she inquired anxiously. "I was horribly rushed by Fred's coming to the house at half past seven."

"I was only thinking you had brought some of the golden sunset into this stuffy room," he said. "I don't think I have ever before noticed such varying tints in the strands of a woman's hair."

Peggy reddened a little, but laughed.

"It's not peroxide, if that is what you mean," she said.

"I have always understood that the peroxide stage came somewhat late in life," he retorted.

"Just about the time a man's hair begins to fall off."

"Probably—about the period of the silver wedding, in fact."

"That seems like looking rather far ahead, doesn't it?"

"This is my first attempt to peer into the future in that respect; but please pardon the remark. I just blurted out the first words that came into my head. I suppose one's nerves relax unconsciously, though I used to pride myself on not having nerves, and have never sympathized sufficiently with fellows who suffered from shell shock. Perhaps, it is by force of contrast. After a hectic day, here am I dining with—you!"

Peggy's heart throbbed a little then. She knew full well that this good-looking inspector of police was telling her that he admired her, and was doing it with a boyish reserve immensely more effective than the outspoken compliments to which she was accustomed. She wondered how a housemaid, or lady's maid, as she was supposed to be—for Furneaux had warned her that no one in Dorking was aware of her true status—would behave in such conditions.

"Evidently you are not married," she tittered, "or you would not care what color my hair was."

"That is profoundly true," he said. "I am not married, nor likely to be for some years, if ever. May I explain that somewhat cryptic remark?"

"Why?"

"Because, if a man is not a prig, he should not pose as one."

"Oh, please tell me!"

"I have given no thought to marriage, because I am not in a position to maintain a wife."

"But, my goodness, that shouldn't stop you from trying to find the right girl!"

"It has done so—hitherto."

Peggy was profoundly thankful that an Italian waiter should enter just then, and should be dispatched for cocktails. She regained her breath during the interlude, short though it was.

"You've told me absolutely nothing about all the exciting things the evening papers have printed," she protested.

"I have not set eyes on a newspaper since seven o'clock this morning, but I shall be astonished if any journalist knows half what you know, Miss Mainwaring. However, here goes!"

He gave her a fairly comprehensive résumé of the Ruffini incident and other minor circumstances. She was immensely amused at hearing of the mole on the shoulder blade of the lady who purchased a costume in the Rue Blanche.

"Surely even Mr. Furneaux doesn't regard that as much of a clew!" she cried. "It will be splendid as a means of identification, but first you will have to catch the woman."

"And half strip her," put in the little detective himself. "Yet I admit that your sex saves a lot of trouble in that respect nowadays."

"Not when we are liable to display large moles," Peggy retorted.

"Anyhow, I see an appalling number of scraggy necks. Ah, here comes a genial ruffian who is an expert authority on such matters!"

The chief entered, smiling.

"I was half afraid you might have elected to travel north by the night train, Miss Mainwaring," he said.

"How did you hear anything about my going to Scotland?" demanded Peggy, round-eyed.

"Your butler is a much-worried man these days. Fearing he might have said too much to Lord Robert Ferris, he rang up my office, and Mr. Sheldon, in my absence, telegraphed to Lord Copmanthorpe, requesting him to permit you to remain in London. When you reach home this evening, you may find that your journey has been countermanded."

"Oh, I do hope so!" she cried delightedly. "I shall eat with a good appetite now. Indeed, I think I ought to. I missed my luncheon, and have only had a cup of tea since breakfast."

"All being well, you shall have the best dinner London can provide. Have you seen Signor Pucci?"

"The fat man?"

"Yes—he eats his own food. What a testimonial! Do you hear the stairs creaking? He is coming to tell us what he is providing for the feast. We dine here on all really great occasions, such as this, though you would never imagine it by looking at Furneaux."

"In effect," smirked Furneaux, "you can now see the vital distinction between a *gourmand* and a *gourmet*. Pucci, of course, being a professional, is *hors concours*."

Peggy took his point instantly. Her eyes danced in rapid survey of the three men.

"You and I, Mr. Linton," she said, "are between the horns of a dilemma. I take it that if we eat with a good appetite, we shall emulate Mr. Winter in size, whereas, if we are Spartan in our choice of food, we may resemble Mr. Furneaux."

"My advice is that you should follow whatever system you have adopted thus far," said Linton.

Signor Pucci came in.

"Silence now for the oracle!" commanded the chief.

His seriousness evoked a laugh. Most certainly the sinister shadow of M. Lefèvre was not permitted to cast any gloom on that merry gathering.

XVII

A MOST pleasant and excellent meal passed without the diners being disturbed by telephone or official messenger, though, to be sure, both Winter and Furneaux looked for quick results from the campaign of inquiry they had set on foot. It was still daylight at half past nine, when Linton was intrusted with the pleasant task of

escorting Miss Mainwaring to Curzon Street.

"Is there any reason why we shouldn't walk?" inquired the girl.

"None whatever," said the chief. "Turn to the right, and you will be in Oxford Street in a few minutes. Mr. Furneaux and I will leave later. If you are at the Yard about half past ten, Mr. Linton, Sheldon will tell you where you lodge for the night. He is trying to secure a bed for you somewhere near the Strand."

"Why shouldn't I stay at my club?"

"What club?"

"The Rag."

"That will suit admirably."

"I'll call there on my way, and see if they have a vacant room."

Furneaux caught a meditative gleam in the Hon. Peggy's eye, but passed no comment until the two young people had left the restaurant.

"Explanations will now follow," he said then, watching Winter lighting a fresh cigar.

"And none too soon. Why should we want that poor lad to be plagued by an impossible love affair?"

"*Nom d'un nom!* Why impossible?"

"Have you forgotten that Lord Copmanthorpe is Home Secretary—a prominent member of the present government?"

"Yes, a Home Secretary with a seat in the House of Lords! One peep of snobbery out of him, one undemocratic shake of the head, and the band of Scottish brothers on the Labor benches in Parliament will rend him limb from limb!"

Winter flung away the remains of a match with a gesture that was almost impatient.

"Are we chasing rogues or running a matrimonial bureau?" he cried.

"We needn't do a thing more for Arthur and Peggy. Did you notice how they swallowed each other with every course? Arthur was saying to himself how idyllic life would be if such a girl sat opposite regularly at meal time, and she was thinking how safe she would feel in the arms of a fine, upstanding—"

"Oh, cut it out, for Heaven's sake! Let's just make sure they are all right, and then hurry to headquarters."

Neither Peggy nor her companion was aware that a taxi containing the men they had just left turned down Regent Street when they themselves crossed Oxford Cir-

cus. It was within the bounds of reasonable chance that they might have been shadowed by some human ferret prowling around Soho, so the detectives made sure—that was all. Linton, it is true, did not forget to keep his eyes about him, but it is difficult to exercise several senses at once, and Miss Peggy was occupying his mind almost exclusively at that moment.

She put him on the rack as soon as they left the restaurant.

"If you're a member of the Rag, you must have held a commission," she said.

"Yes," he agreed.

"What regiment were you in?"

"The East Kents."

Silence for a few seconds. Obviously the girl was puzzled as to the best way of phrasing the next question.

"I wasn't cashiered, or anything like that," he went on with a smile. "I had to consider the future, and the army seemed to offer a dead end after the war. There are heaps of young captains with the D. S. O., and they cannot all become generals. As a matter of fact, I couldn't see myself a colonel in twenty years, and I had a perfect horror of becoming a time-expired major; so I chose the police, in which the prospects are fair."

"Do you mean in the higher ranks?"

"Yes. My uncle, Colonel Hollies, is keeping a chief constableness warm for me, but—"

"But what?"

"I am beginning to dread the social complexities of life in England. Really, it would appear that a fellow might be happier on the land, in South Africa, or California, or western Canada."

"Why, only this morning you were saying that—"

"Yes, I admit a remarkable change in my opinions."

"What brought it about?"

"I can hardly express myself clearly—yet."

Peggy had already gained some slight experience of Linton's trick of adding a remarkably suggestive word to a sentence which might otherwise have been complete without it, thus altering its significance entirely.

"I see!" she said, after a little pause.

"I'm glad of that," he could not help commenting.

"Or I think I do. I'm only a girl, with little experience of the world, but one must

be stupid indeed if one fails to realize that the pleasant old England of other days has gone, and that a rather unpleasant new England is taking its place. That isn't a sly dig at the American invasion. What I mean is that our people are unhappy, dissatisfied, disunited, ready to listen to any crank who promises them a Utopia without work. No wonder all the oak trees in our parks are dying! Oh, you needn't look at me as if the new moon had affected my wits. I, too, have been thinking hard to-day. Who wouldn't, after what has happened during the past twenty-four hours? And that is why I am sure Mr. Furneaux's theory is right. Evil thoughts can be put into the mind of the public, just as deadly germs can be introduced into its body. But—excuse plain speaking, Captain Linton—even a mere woman, or a slip of a girl, whichever you choose to consider me, might well imagine that a man like you would prefer your recent adventures in England to growing oranges in the Far West or Farthest South."

"The two occupations differ widely."

"A chief constablenesship is quite a well paid post, isn't it?"

"Yes, as things go."

"Yet you have suddenly grown dissatisfied with the professional outlook?"

"Yes."

"How odd!"

The Hon. Peggy was playing with fire, and she knew it, but every woman is a born salamander in some respects. She had literally compelled Linton either to tell her the literal truth—that an embryonic chief constable simply cannot marry a girl in domestic service—or to wrench the conversation into a new channel. She was well aware that he would neither do the one thing nor be willing to attempt the other, and, sad to relate, she seemed to enjoy his dilemma.

But this young man had brains, and was using them.

"I am sure you do not mean to taunt me," he said quietly. "Some day you will understand that unforeseen circumstances can arise in a man's life which he has to face candidly, if they affect his career. Indeed, I can promise now that you shall know what those circumstances are, but not until M. Lefèvre and his gang are hanged or sent to penal servitude."

Peggy flinched at that. It suddenly occurred to her that she was hardly acting

quite fairly to one who had virtually told her that she was the cause of his new worries. Then she reddened to her shoulder blades as she perceived, just in the nick of time, that the avowal trembling on her lips was tantamount to saying that there was no great social disparity between a peer's daughter and a budding chief constable of an important county.

So it was she, and not Linton, who was compelled to change the subject—though, true daughter of Eve, she could not make up her mind to get rid of it altogether.

"As you are a member of the Rag, you probably know Lord Robert Ferris?" she said.

"Oh, yes. Of course, being poor, I am not in his set, and he would be vastly amused if he met me in my police sergeant's uniform; but he is not a bad chap. How came he to drag you away from Dorking to-day? Is he a close friend of some member of Lord Copmanthorpe's family?"

"He has been one of that crowd for years," she answered airily. "Poor old Hobbs, the butler—if ever you meet Mr. Hobbs you will appreciate the humor of the situation—blurted out something this morning about the terrible doings in Curzon Street and elsewhere, so Lord Robert thought it his duty to interfere."

"Where you were concerned?"

"Well, yes. He couldn't exactly grab poor Monica out of bed, could he?"

Peggy preened herself on the subtlety of that reply; but Linton was a single-minded person. She herself had started a hare, and he proceeded to course it ruthlessly.

"I would like to understand exactly why he thought fit to follow you all the way to Dorking. If he was sent by some one who had more authority than a butler, all well and good. If not, he behaved with an impudence for which he ought to be called to account."

"Oh, dear me! Didn't I tell you that Lady Copmanthorpe telegraphed most emphatically ordering me to Scotland to-morrow? I don't know even yet whether I am relieved or not."

"You would prefer to stay?"

"Of course I would. What girl wouldn't? Existence in Mayfair can be horribly dull, I assure you, even when brightened with motor rides with the Bobby Ferrises of society."

"Still, Miss Mainwaring, I am puzzled," persisted Linton. "Did Lady Copman-

thorpe literally request Ferris to pursue you and bring you home?"

"No, not exactly. I rather suspect Mr. Hobbs. But here we are at the end of Davies Street. I only have to walk a few yards now, so I must say good night. I've had an awfully jolly and exciting evening, for I never knew at what minute the Ristorante Milano might go up with a loud bang!"

"May I not come with you, and find out what has been decided as to your possible journey to-morrow?"

"And give Mr. Hobbs further ground for suspicion? Oh, no! Telephone me in the morning, before nine. I shall not leave earlier, even if I have to catch the Scotch express."

"Which is your house?"

"That Georgian one, with the curved windows."

"Well, I shall watch you until you are safe behind the closed door. Which way do you enter?"

"By the main door—after ten. Good-by! You'll be sure to telephone?"

"Not even Mr. Furneaux shall stop me!" declared Linton.

"I mean that I want to hear from you if I go away—about the present excitement, of course. You wouldn't care to write to me otherwise."

The naughty girl sped off then. She raced through a comparatively empty street, and was on the point of running up the few steps to her residence when a man seemed to spring out of nowhere in particular. He hailed her with a husky:

"Beg pardon, miss—may I have a word with you? Do you live here?"

Peggy had plenty of courage, but it took all her nerve to stand fast and say steadily:

"Yes. What is it?"

"I'd like to see the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring for a few seconds."

"Why not ring, and inquire for her?"

"I've done it twice, but I've been shooed off, an' each time a cop has grabbed me to ask my business. Here he comes again now!"

Sure enough, a burly person in plain clothes was advancing rapidly down the street. Linton, too, must be approaching from the other end, so Peggy grew confident.

"I am Miss Mainwaring," she admitted.

"Well, I've taken a chance in comin' here, an' I may be locked up for it, but

that's nothing. Keep indoors, miss! Better still, get away from London. I mean well, so mum's the word! Remember, miss, I was only askin' for a job."

"I'll speak to Mr. Hobbs, if you wish," she said clearly; "but I fear it is not of much use, as this house will probably be closed early in July."

"Now, then!" came a cold official voice. "You here again? What did I tell you last time?"

The detective grabbed the man with the decisive air of one who would stand no more nonsense, but Peggy heard Linton behind her, and turned. With true feminine impulse, swayed only by intuition, she had resolved to champion the unknown.

"Please, Mr. Linton," she cried, "don't let this poor fellow be arrested. He meant no harm. He—he merely wanted me to intercede with our people in his behalf, as he is out of work."

The detective, a district man, had never heard of Linton, and certainly would not have freed his prisoner because of representations made by a stranger; but he knew the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring well by sight, it being part of his duty to memorize the faces and physique of important residents in Mayfair.

"Very well, miss," he said, before Linton could utter a word; "but I ought to warn this man that he's risking a lot in waylaying young ladies like you in the street. What's your name?" the detective added, looking sternly into the intruder's eyes.

"Robert Jenks."

"Where do you live?"

"Anywhere, an' anyhow."

"So I should think! Do you know who you've been speaking to?"

"Of course I do—Lord Copmanthorpe's daughter. She don't remember me, but she's been a good friend to my mother for the last two years."

Peggy's face had turned scarlet now. She alone could interpret accurately Linton's amazed silence. Indeed, the detective's suspicious gaze had turned on him more than once already.

She pulled herself together sufficiently to cry in astonishment:

"Are you the soldier son of Mrs. Jenks, who lives in Riverside Cottages, near the Peak?"

"Yes, miss. That's why I made bold to say what I did."

Linton had found his tongue by this time. "There seems to be a certain indefiniteness about the identity of more than one person present," he said, and the metallic rasp in his utterance was altogether new in Peggy's ears. "What regiment did you serve in?"

"The Royal Fusiliers."

"Which battalion?"

"The fifth; but I don't see—"

"Are you Lance Corporal Jenks, of B Company?"

"Yes, sir."

The man unconsciously squared his shoulders, and surveyed his questioner with a sudden intentness.

"I recall both your face and your voice now," smiled Linton. "I suppose you have not forgotten the night on the Menin *pavé*, when you guided the relief by the sparks struck from the flints by a *boche* machine gun which had the range?"

"Lord love a duck! You're Captain Linton, of the East Kents!"

"Well, suppose we allow Miss Mainwaring—whose courtesy title I am not yet acquainted with—to go inside her house. Then you and I can have a chat about old times. I may be able to help, too."

"I must find another opportunity to explain matters," said Peggy, trying desperately hard to be dignified and self-possessed. "Others than you have experienced difficulties as to correct nomenclature, sergeant—I beg your pardon, I should have said inspector—or is it Captain Linton?"

Having achieved the last word, though not with convincing success, she hastened up the steps and let herself in with a latch-key. At that moment the telephone rang, and the butler appeared.

"That 'll be her ladyship, miss," he said uneasily. "Lady Copmanthorpe has called twice, and is very much upset."

Peggy had not many seconds in which to collect her wits before her mother was demanding, in the staccato accents of maternal annoyance, where she had been, and what on earth "all this" meant.

Peggy was quite firm, as every well regulated young woman nowadays has to be with one or both of her parents.

"It is quite obvious, dearest," she said calmly, "that you have worked yourself up into a state of agitation about nothing in particular. Haven't you received the telegrams I sent you?"

"Yes, but—"

"And isn't it evident that I cannot say over the public telephone what I told you I had written and posted in good time for the mail?"

"Yes, but that is not the point; and please don't begin lecturing me."

"Darling, a simple statement of fact is not a lecture."

"Peggy, what is the matter with you? Why should not your father and I be alarmed when, in the existing conditions, we call three times in two hours, and are told you are out, and that Hobbs has no idea where to get in touch with you? It is just the same with Bobby Ferris."

"Has he been out, too?"

"You know very well what I mean. He is consumed with anxiety about you."

"Have you been phoning him?"

"Really, Peggy, any one would think from your tone that it was I, and not you, who had been behaving in such an extraordinary way!"

"Mother, dear, don't we belong to the Home Secretary's family?"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Everything. I simply dare not explain, except that I have been dining with Scotland Yard officials, and that two detectives have just seen me enter our front door. I am in no danger."

"But you must be. If not, why should Scotland Yard—"

"Please, darling!"

"Well, I really don't know what to say. You may be right. Probably you are; but on no account leave the house again until I ring in the morning."

"So I am not to come to Scotland?"

"No. Dear, oh, dear! I am so worried that I haven't told you we are joining you as soon as possible—by to-morrow night's mail, in fact."

"That is splendid! So dad is able to travel?"

"Yes. At any rate, he feels he ought to be in London."

"Then wild horses shall not drag me out again before I hear from you—about breakfast time, I suppose. Good night, darling. Sleep well!"

"One thing more—I promised Bobby you would give him a call, and reassure him."

"Oh, of course, I'll do that, with great pleasure."

The sheer joy of the undertaking was manifest a few minutes later when she ob-

tained a number at some residential mansions in St. James's Street.

"That you, Bobby?" she said.

"Hello, Peggy!" came the reply. "By Jove, it's a relief to hear your voice. Where are you speaking from?"

"Home. Will you do something to oblige me, Bobby?"

"Just try me!"

"Well, I only want you to mind your own business for the next day or two. It's a slight request. Can't you take your company for a route march, or examine the canteen accounts, or do something equally valuable and time-consuming?"

"Look here, old girl—"

"I can't. I'm tired, and rather cross. For goodness' sake stop worrying mother, who will be here on Saturday. So long!"

In effect, the Hon. Peggy's small world was in a whirl, and she was beginning to feel the strain of continually readjusting her mental poise.

While crossing the hall, she noticed a table and two easy chairs in the cloak room, and asked why certain plates and glasses were set forth. The butler explained.

"An inspector called here an hour ago, miss," he said, "and wished me to arrange some place where two men could sit all night. They will come on duty at eleven."

"Two policemen?"

"Yes, miss. It seems the house has to be guarded inside as well as out."

"What fun! Are we at war again, Hobbs?"

"Looks like it, miss. A rough-spoken sort of fellow called here twice this evening, and—"

"A man named Jenks?"

"So he said."

"Oh, he's all right. I met him outside."

The butler had to be satisfied with this cryptic remark, as his young mistress went straight to her room. She did not turn on the light, but opened a window and looked down into Curzon Street, which was somewhat more animated now, as people were coming home from late dinners or early concerts. In another hour, when the theaters closed, the thoroughfare would be busy again.

She could discern nothing unusual or out of the way in the external aspect of things. London was peaceful and decorous as ever. Yet she sat there a long time, peering into the lamp-lit vistas, though hardly seeing them, for her thoughts were with a man

who, if words meant anything, had dreamed of sacrificing a career for the sake of a girl—a girl whom he had met for the first time only thirty hours earlier.

XVIII

MEANWHILE there had been a somewhat earnest discussion on the pavement. The detective, whose name was Dewar, was by no means prepared to part company with the two men who had come together so unexpectedly, while Linton had his own reasons for not wishing to declare openly what his present occupation was.

Dewar insisted so strenuously that the others should accompany the nearest policeman to the district station that his colleague had no option but to produce a warrant card, which, of course, put matters right instantly. As Linton had foreseen, however, Jenks became intractable.

"What d'ye want with me, anyhow?" came the sulky demand. "The young lady told you straight enough why I tackled her, didn't she?"

"Yes," agreed Linton. "That is not the point. As an old comrade in the field, I am ready to give you a helping hand, but we ought to talk things over first. I have half an hour to spare. Why not come and have a drink, and some supper?"

Jenks had suddenly grown furtive and restless. His eyes peered hither and thither. He seemed to expect, or fear, that something would happen.

"If you're in the police, sir," he almost whispered, "I daren't be seen with you, an' that's Gawd's own truth!"

"I won't ask you why, though your nerves must be in a poor way if you are afraid of any danger here. Now, let me persuade you. Let us take that taxi, and drive to a restaurant in the Strand. No one can possibly know we are in the car, or where we are going. Come, Jenks, pull yourself together! You didn't need telling that on the Menin Road; so, why now?"

Still unwilling, and watching the street both ways, Jenks allowed himself to be led to the vacant taxi, which had just brought four people to a neighboring house. He sighed with relief when the vehicle was in the thick of the traffic along Piccadilly.

"Well, I've gone an' done it now," he muttered, as if reasoning with himself. "Done myself in twice to-night, I have, for I couldn't bear to stand by an' see that nice young lady blown to bits without my

havin' warned her. But they'll get me for this, I know, as sure as the Lord made little apples!"

"I don't agree with you. You're low-spirited and run down, or you would never believe that a gang of lunatics and criminals can work their will on the people of this country."

"What's that? What do you know about it?"

Jenks's consternation was now so overpowering that he literally trembled.

"A good deal. Don't think for a moment that high explosives and deadly drugs can be manufactured in England without the authorities becoming aware of the facts. Neither can Communistic bosh be preached only to those prepared to swallow it; but we cannot talk here. Wait till we have eaten something, and find some place where we can have a quiet smoke."

"Where are we goin'?"

"To a café in the Strand. You heard me telling the driver."

Jenks threw out his hands helplessly.

"I only hope it won't vanish off the map while we're in it," he muttered. "Well, I'm game, for all that. I haven't had a square meal for weeks, though I was promised a good supper to-night, later on."

A dozen questions suggested by those few words leaped to Linton's mind, yet he dared put one alone—the vitally important one.

"Why have you a notion that a perfectly harmless chophouse may be blown to pieces to-night?" he said, forcing a laugh.

"Because something is goin' to happen to-night, sir, though I don't know what, or

when, or where. They don't tell us poor fellows much. We're to have our innings when London is half in ruins, they say."

It was an exasperating position, but Linton kept his head. He saw no good purpose to be served by deviating from his original plan. By hook or by crook, he meant to bring Jenks in touch with Winter and Furneaux as quickly as possible; but the man was manifestly so scared that he had to be handled gently, or he might break down completely.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "here we are! I'm afraid we cannot get a drink, but there will be enough to eat, and I'll find some whisky or beer elsewhere. Hello, what's up now?"

Jenks, white-lipped and terror-stricken, had shrunk behind him, as a tall, elderly, well dressed man emerged from the door of the restaurant and hired the cab they had quitted.

"Can you be at Paddington station by half past ten?" said this person to the taxi driver.

"I'll try," was the answer.

"Double fare if you do it!"

The taxi made off.

"That's one of 'em!" Jenks whispered hoarsely. "He's one who talks to us fellows. D'ye think he twigg'd me? If so, my number's up!"

Again Linton had to let an opportunity pass.

"Oh, come on!" he said, disregarding his companion's cowering attitude. "If we don't hurry, we shan't get a steak, and that is what you want just now more than anything else in creation!"

(To be continued in the April number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

LET ME BE YOUR BOSWELL!

LET me be your Boswell,
And walk the world with you,
To chronicle your beauty,
Your mind so fair and true,
The graces of your nature,
The gems of thought you strew.

Sweet, in the lap of evening,
With day's brave banners furled,
Your speech is low and golden,
With ancient wisdom pearled.
Oh, let me be your Boswell,
And I will tell the world!

Olin Lyman

The Wind of Luck

IS IT TRUE OR UNTRUE THAT THE CHANCES OF LIFE ARE ALWAYS SUBJECT TO THE LAW OF AVERAGES?

By William H. Hamby

JAMISON sat on the landward side, looking out morosely over the Chinese city. Chung Yong, his China boy, who had come on board with the luggage, stood respectfully waiting his attention to say good-by to him. Burnell, a man whom Jamison had met in the interior of China several times during the past two years, leaned on the rail, smoking a long, black cigar.

The purser came on deck and announced that the ship's sailing would be delayed twenty-four hours. Most of the passengers hurried into shore boats and put off to the city, for one more day in China. Jamison only hunched himself the deeper into his steamer chair, and scowled the harder at the September sky that arched softly over a glamorous segment of that strange old land of mystery.

The deck was cleared, except for the China boy, who still waited to say good-by, and Burnell at the rail, smoking his black cigar—and, yes, a young woman who walked past Jamison, looking at him out of the tail of her eye. She stopped farther up the deck, and turned back.

She walked past Jamison again, looking at him a little more provocatively. She was an American, apparently, with an alluring face and a striking figure. The fit of her clothes and the unrestrained swing of her limbs freely displayed her physical charms; but Jamison's eyes never swerved a fraction of an inch to follow her, nor did his blood quicken by one heartbeat.

"Me go now." The China boy approached a little nearer. "Me say good-by. When you go Melica, you get Melican boy."

Jamison rubbed his neck around in his collar. A collar button had worn through the flap of his shirt, and was scratching his

skin. He ran his finger under the collar, yanking it up with a disgusted grimace. Then he turned to the China boy.

"Where you going, Chung Yong—back to the mission school?"

"No—me go work for some other Melican man."

"But I thought you were a mission boy?"

"Me was. Me go to mission man and worship his God, to get him teach me English. When me no speak English, get six, seven dollar month. When me learn speak good English, then me work for you at thirty dollars month. Now me don't need worship Melican God any more."

"All right, Chung! Whatever god you worship, I hope he'll bring you better luck than mine has—if I have one. Good-by!"

The China boy gone, Burnell turned from the railing and came and sat down beside Jamison.

"Do you know why the sailing has been delayed?"

"No." Jamison was not interested in the reason. "I never ask for the pedigree of old Bad Luck."

"It's the Derby," said Burnell. "This is the big day of the races. The captain and his officers wanted a final fling at it. Suppose"—Burnell felt in his pocket for a match—"we go over and try our luck?"

Jamison laughed. It was much the sort of laugh a tramp might give if asked to contribute to a home for stray bulldogs.

"Luck!" His tone had an ironic inflection. "Try our luck! If you knew what my luck is, you wouldn't want to be present when it's tried!"

Burnell leaned back in his deck chair, his face taking the look of a man who is always seeking, but has never quite found the answer.

"Luck is a queer thing. In America we think of it merely as a series of accidents, some good and some bad, the good and the bad fairly well balanced. Over here it is something invisible, but personal. To the oriental, luck is some sort of impish, freakish spirit that plays diabolical tricks on him when he is doing his best, and heaps gifts in his hands when he is doing his worst. We call luck the law of average, and insist that it plays no vital part in the long run. The oriental, believing that it is outside of him, feels that he has nothing to do with it except to lay off when it is against him, and to play hard when it runs with him."

Jamison was a large man with a sensitive face, marked by many disappointments, but his eyes were still defiant. He looked around at his companion.

"I think they are nearer right than we."

Burnell shook his head, smiling skeptically at his companion's pessimism.

"The wind may blow from the east for a long time, but it always changes. Luck is only the dropping of unrelated accidents into our daily routine; and, like the fall of the dice, in a thousand throws the sum about balances. I know you feel that you have been dogged by bad luck, but—"

"Dogged? I'd say wolfed!"

"But if a man uses good judgment and is persistent—"

"Good judgment!" Jamison flared at him. "For ten years I had, as my twin gods, safety and good judgment; but luck followed along after me with a club, and knocked every venture I made in the head before it could walk. I am a surgeon—or was one. My reputation was spreading over half the continent. One evening, while sitting on my porch, reading a medical review, the rocker of my chair found the one weak board in the floor, and I fell over backward and broke my left shoulder. The joint was crushed so badly that I never fully regained the use of it."

"Lucky," said Burnell, "that it was not your right arm!"

"I operate with my left."

Burnell whistled under his breath.

"That was tough!"

"I had already earned more than a hundred thousand dollars. A week before the accident I deposited fifty thousand dollars in a trust company. With the other fifty thousand I bought half a million dollars' worth of Liberty bonds, paying ten per cent down and borrowing the rest. The trust

company failed, and paid five cents on the dollar. Liberty bonds, which I bought at par, slumped to eighty-five. The bank sold out at ninety, to protect itself."

"Of course," said Burnell, "luck does seem to run in streaks."

"In streams, you mean," corrected Jamison. "Those are only three out of a hundred instances—some small, but none the less exasperating. This was one of the most ironic"—Jamison smiled cynically—"while I was in France, helping to make the world safe for democracy, my *fiancée*, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, married the golf professional at our country club."

Burnell laughed.

"Perhaps that was foreordination rather than luck," he suggested.

"Anyway," said Jamison, relapsing into moodiness, "I think the oriental is right. Luck is something outside of you—something set to play tiddledywinks with your most serious plans." The speaker's eyes smoldered angrily. "But, damn him, he'll have to play the game clear to the end with me! I won't quit. I'm going back to America to try it again."

Burnell arose and lighted a cigar.

"Come on, let's go to the races. You've got the grumps, and need a little sport."

"Not me!" Jamison shook his head decisively, and slipped down in his chair again. "I stick on this boat until I get to America."

"Oh, come on!" urged Burnell. "Be a good fellow. I need company, and I want to go to the races."

Again Jamison shook his head stubbornly, but Burnell persisted.

"Damn it, man!" Jamison blurted at last. "I'm broke—dead broke. I've got my ticket and just ten dollars."

"No matter!" Burnell waved the objection aside. "It's my party. I've got to have company."

Jamison yielded, and went.

II

THE Hongkong race course is in Happy Valley, which also contains the cricket and football fields—and the graveyard. The third race was just being called as Burnell and Jamison sauntered along the circle of betting booths. It was a perfect September day, and there was a large and variegated crowd. People of almost every nationality in the world were swirling about the betting

booths, all bent on putting their luck to the test.

That is one of the fascinations of gambling. Even the prudent, hard-headed man feels that out somewhere there is something called luck. He is uncertain whether it is his friend or his foe. By buying a piece of cardboard with the name of a horse upon it, by drawing a card from a deck, or by the drop of a ball in the roulette pocket, he has a notion that he can put the thing to a test, and see whether luck is running with him or against him. If he wins, fortune is his friend, and he is more exhilarated than from a glass of wine. If he loses, and has persistency, he will go at it again and again, trying to change his luck.

Burnell stopped at the first booth and bought a five-dollar ticket on a strange horse. Jamison sauntered beside him, glum and cynical, still annoyed at having been dragged unwillingly from the ship to this most futile of all fields of chance.

At the second booth Burnell bought another ticket, and handed it to his friend.

"Here's one. Try your luck with this."

"I don't want it." Jamison shook his head. "I am not a gambler. I have played the game a little, here and there, but it isn't in my line, and I have no intention of giving up five dollars of my last ten to pay for this thing."

"I don't expect you to. Take it. If you win, you can pay me, and if you don't—"

Jamison took it grudgingly, stuck it in his vest pocket, and turned to watch the race.

"There!" Burnell turned to Jamison when the winners were posted. "I told you your luck would soon change. Your horse has won. Your ticket pays eighteen dollars!"

In spite of himself, Jamison felt a thrill—his first happy stir for many months. Eighteen dollars is a good deal of money to a man who has only ten. Could this be a friendly nudge from the spirit of luck?

He collected his winnings, and took out five dollars to bet on another horse. He looked at the list posted for the next race. There was only one name on it of which he had ever heard—Standard Oil. Stopping at the first booth, he threw down a five-dollar bill and asked for a ticket on Standard Oil. The Chink gave him a piece of cardboard, which Jamison stuck in his pocket and walked away.

"Are you betting on this race?" Burnell asked.

"Yes—I paid five dollars for a ticket on Standard Oil."

Jamison took it out, to look at it for the first time.

"Why, that isn't Standard Oil!" exclaimed Burnell. "That's Punjab."

A man may carry a weight of trouble, disappointment, and bad luck for months and months, and bear up under it with a grim sort of humor. Then there comes some trivial irritation, like the scratching of a collar button, or this blunder over a five-dollar ticket, and his anger breaks out like an eruptive volcano. Jamison was mad—thoroughly, raspily mad. This was the one fling too much from bad luck, and it was the Chinaman's fault.

He walked swiftly back to the booth, threw down the ticket, and demanded one on Standard Oil. The Chinaman could not speak English, nor could he make Jamison understand Chinese. The more Jamison swore, the more futilely the Chinaman chattered. Jamison's temper snapped. He reached over the board counter, grabbed the man by the cue, and yanked him out of the booth.

The Chinaman's squawks brought a sergeant of police—a raw Scotsman—who demanded to know what it was all about.

"This damned Chinaman," said Jamison, "gave me a ticket on the wrong horse. I asked for Standard Oil, and he's given me Punjab."

"Sir," said the policeman dourly, "if you had taken the trouble to look, you would have seen that there is a separate booth for each horse. This is for Punjab." He pointed to a spot above the door where, plainly posted, was the name of the horse. "Only tickets on Punjab are sold here. You have bought one, and it cannot be exchanged."

Few times in his life had Jamison been so thoroughly angry with the whole universe as he was when he returned to his friend at the race track fence. The next race had already begun, and the horses were sweeping down the field. For once the crowd was still. There was no shouting, no one was cheering his favorite. The whole mob of bettors seemed stunned and awed. They were looking across the track with a blank stare, as if watching some natural phenomenon, like a cyclone or breaking dam.

Jamison looked. One horse was more than two hundred yards ahead of all the rest.

"It's that wild Siberian pony," said Burnell. "No one ever heard of him before. They say he killed his stable boy this morning. I didn't know he was to run."

"What's his name?" Jamison asked, still angry.

"Punjab," Burnell told him.

"Punjab?" Jamison wheeled on his friend, and fairly snatched the glasses from Burnell's hand. He read the number on the flying pony, and then consulted his program. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said reverently.

"I'll give you a hundred and fifty dollars for that ticket," offered Burnell.

Jamison shook his head.

"No—I'll see him through now."

The man at the board was posting the winners, and the rate they paid. For No. 4, which was Punjab, he wrote the figures "124."

"There!" said Burnell, laughing again. "You would have been better off to have taken my offer of a hundred and fifty."

But just then the man reached up and added another figure. The five-dollar ticket on Punjab paid twelve hundred and forty-six dollars.

Nothing shoves a man into the spotlight of admiration more quickly than a bunch of luck. Jamison was the hero of the day. He held the only ticket on Punjab, and had won the largest odds of the races. The judges invited him into the grand stand. He was applauded and smiled at and envied. Ah, but all the world loves a man who has luck!

As they returned through the city, Jamison said to Burnell:

"I am going to get my China boy and take him as far as Shanghai with me. The poor little devil felt all cut up at leaving me this morning."

They went to Chung Yong's home. Chung had left the place, his father said, two hours ago, for a long journey with an Englishman.

"I'm darned sorry for that," Jamison remarked, as they set off for the ship. "I like the little devil."

As they approached the wharf, Jamison exclaimed:

"Why, there is Chung Yong!" He called to the China boy, who was sitting on the edge of the dock. Chung jumped up,

and came running, with delight in his round face.

"Chung, I thought you were gone."

Chung shook his head.

"Me was, but him no like me."

Jamison was surprised, for Chung was the best servant he ever saw.

"Why not?" he asked.

"We start to boat," explained Chung.

"I carry bag. A Chinaman run from policeman, knock me down, and spill my bag." He spread out his hands to indicate that the contents went all over the street. "He"—referring to his new employer—"give me dollar and kick, and tell me go hellee."

Jamison laughed.

"Well, that is luck for me. Come on, I want you to go to Shanghai with me."

III

WORD of Jamison's phenomenal winning at the races got about on the boat, and he attracted more attention on deck and in the dining saloons than many an international celebrity.

The next morning, after the boat sailed, he was in a steamer chair, with a rug about his legs, smoking one of the dozen good cigars that had been offered him during his first day out. The girl who had shown herself interestingly to him on his first morning at Hongkong came along, gave him a look of recognition, and slipped down into the chair beside him. It was not her chair, but she had the air of a privileged person. She crossed her legs, showing a very trim ankle and an expensive low shoe.

"I hear you made a killing at the races."

Her voice was rich and pleasant, and her eyes were warmly admiring. Jamison laughed. His spirits had entirely changed since returning to the boat. He felt exhilarated and adventurous.

"I have seen places on the great desert where a black tin would attract attention for ten miles. This little streak of luck of mine is like that."

"I should judge"—she was looking at him quite frankly—"that you are a very lucky man."

"Then I judge," he replied, "that you know nothing of either men or luck, for if ever there was a fellow born under a whole constellation of unlucky stars, and never able to get out from under them, I am that fellow!"

She leaned forward and laid her hand on his arm.

"There he comes," she said, glancing along the deck.

"Who is he?"

Jamison's eyes took in a huge Russian with a terrific black beard.

"Duke Nicola." Her tone was a bit awed. "They say that he got out with a sack full of gold, and that he has it with him."

The big Russian stalked grandly down the deck. His ignominious flight from the Bolsheviks and the wreck of his country had not interfered with his bearing. To himself, at least, he was still a great duke.

As he passed, his roving eye took in the girl, including her trim ankle and dainty low shoe.

"The old chap has quite an eye for beauty," Jamison remarked.

"Thanks," said the girl. "Are you going back to America?"

"Yes. Are you?"

She nodded.

"It was only a wild freak that brought me over to China. It was the most accidental sort of thing in the world, and"—she shrugged—"I haven't had a particularly good time."

Jamison saw that she was heading pretty directly for that twelve hundred dollars. He conveniently remembered that he had to go down to write some letters.

It was fifty-two hours up to Shanghai, and when the ship anchored in the bay, fifteen miles below the city, boats immediately swarmed about her, ready to take passengers up the river.

"Are you going up?"

Burnell had joined Jamison at the rail.

"Yes," replied Jamison. He was smoking a cigarette. He took it from his mouth, and blew a cloud of smoke into the wind. "You know, if I were sensible, I'd keep that twelve hundred until I got back to America. It would come in very handy; but I'm not going to do that."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I'm going up to Shanghai"—Jamison smiled sardonically—"to give my luck another turn."

In Shanghai, Jamison engaged a room at the Victoria Hotel, and asked the clerk where he could find the best gambling place in the city. The clerk strongly recommended the Blue Moon, and Jamison decided to go there about dark.

Two men standing by the desk, talking, accidentally mentioned Jim Denton. Jamison

knew Jim Denton. In fact, he had once saved him from execution by the Chinese government.

"Where is Denton?" he asked, turning to the man who had mentioned Jim's name.

"Managing a road house up the Bubbling Well Road," replied the stranger. "It is owned by a couple of wealthy Chinks, but Denton gets a percentage, and I fancy he isn't especially hard up."

"What's the name of his road house?" Jamison inquired.

"The California," replied the stranger. "It's a high-class sporting place."

Jamison called his China boy, went out into the street, got into a brougham, and ordered the driver to go up the Bubbling Well Road to the California. It was dusk as the brougham drew up in front of the road house.

"Chung Yong," Jamison asked, "should I gamble to-night?"

"You workee hard, and bloke allee same. Maybe you have leetle fun, and he bling good luck."

Jamison laughed.

"We'll try it, anyway."

He got a table out on the veranda, and ordered dinner. Chinese lanterns of many colors hung overhead, the September wind came soft, and the food was good.

He sat toying with a cigarette after the meal was finished. Inside was the large gambling room. They played nothing but roulette. The wheel whirled and the ball spun. The circle of men and women whose money was on the squares stood motionless, breathless, waiting for the ball to drop.

Jamison watched through the open door. There were wheels enough to accommodate all players. The stakes were often heavy. The stranger was right—it was a high-class sporting place. All the patrons were well dressed and well behaved. It was an orderly place for eating, drinking, and gambling; but gambling was the chief interest.

He had not seen Jim Denton. After saving a man's head, one is reticent about thrusting himself forward as if to claim gratitude. He and Jim had not been friends, but mere casual acquaintances.

Denton, coming out on the veranda with a cigar in his mouth, for a breath of air, saw Jamison.

"Why, hello, doc!"

He came to the table and gave him the casual greeting that wanderers exchange whose paths cross at long intervals. Den-

ton sat down, and the two men smoked a cigar together.

"Glad you're not a gambling man, doc—at least, not to-night."

"Why not?"

Denton took the cigar from his mouth, and looked at it between thumb and forefinger, and said in a lower voice:

"We are going to have a flat wheel to-night." That, in the vernacular, meant that they were going to fix one of the roulette wheels. "Some rich Russians are due to leave part of their wad behind them to-night."

"Who are they?" asked Jamison.

"Duke Nicola is the bellwether."

"But, Denton," said Jamison, "I came up here on purpose to have a little sport to-night."

"All right!" Denton nodded. "We are willing to take a good man's money, as well as a duke's."

He rose and walked to the door. After looking over the room he returned.

"Doc, play at the table in the corner, and you'll get a fair run for your money."

"Thanks!"

IV

JAMISON smoked one more cigar. It was pure self-restraint—the holding back of a tremendous desire that was soon to be gratified. He felt almost as if he was physically pulled into the gambling room; and yet he dreaded to put it to the test.

This little streak of luck, the past two days, had lifted a gloom that had oppressed him for years. It had restored his perspective. If he went in and lost, that fatalistic feeling of being marked for disaster would return.

The room was filling rapidly. The circles about the wheels closed up until there were no gaps, and then thickened until the players were two or three deep.

There was a stir. The Russian duke had entered, with a dozen or more in his party—men and women. The wheel in the center of the room was given to them.

Jamison rose, and passed in through the door. He could not longer withhold the test of his luck.

The circle around the wheel in the corner had thinned. The players had gravitated to the center of the room, to watch the Russians. Jamison went to the corner wheel and got a place at the side, where he could easily command the whole table.

He put five dollars on the red. The wheel spun. The ball rolled around and around. The wheel slowed. His heart beat suffocatingly. The ball dropped into the red pocket. He had won!

Jamison could have leaped on the table. He wanted to shout. He might lose a dozen times now—no matter, luck was with him, and he knew he would win.

He played five of the ten on a line between eleven and twelve. Twelve came. He had won seventy-five dollars.

He played deliberately, as if thinking, but with confidence, as if he knew the probable result.

For the first five plays he won every turn. Then he lost twice, and again the winning streak came back.

He played ten dollars on No. 11. The number came, and he took three hundred and fifty dollars in bills.

On the table in the center of the room the Russians were playing heavily, but the flat wheel was getting the gold. The operator allowed them to win on small bets; then, when they doubled up, he raked in the coin.

The word passed that a man at the corner wheel was having a great streak of luck. Some one from the boat recognized Jamison as the man who had made the big winning at the races at Hongkong.

"Let's watch him," the passenger said. "He's the luckiest man in China!"

The bystanders gravitated from the Russians to the corner table. Jamison won and won. The pile of chips before him grew into stacks and cords. Time after time he cashed in hundreds of dollars' worth.

He increased his bets to the limit. The operator, losing steadily, raised the limit from twenty to fifty dollars; but instead of breaking Jamison's luck, the raise only multiplied his winnings.

Four times the dealer sent to Denton for more money. At midnight he sent for Denton, and consulted him about raising the limit again.

"The lid is off!" Denton nodded across the table to Jamison. "If you can break us, go to it!"

They had brought Jamison a high stool, so that he could sit and play comfortably. He was playing a hundred dollars at a turn now, often on different places, but never against himself. If he played twelve to win, he never played twenty-one at the same time, but played on the field that included twelve.

At one o'clock he ordered food, and ate with one hand while he played with the other. His pockets were stuffed with bills and gold. The table before him was solid with tall stacks of chips. His spirits were bubbling. He jested with the dealer and laughed with the crowd. He ordered champagne for everybody. He began drinking himself; but still the winning streak lasted. Every spectator, and, most of all, the dealer, expected at every turn that his luck would desert him, and his winnings begin to melt away.

At three o'clock he bet a hundred dollars on the red, and lost. He bet four times and lost.

"Now, my lad," said the dealer, "we'll see how long you can last!"

Jamison laughed, and laid a hundred dollars on No. 34.

The wheel spun. The ball dropped into No. 34, and the crowd gasped as he raked in thirty-five hundred dollars.

At four o'clock Jamison noticed that the board looked blurred. He had to concentrate, in order to see the numbers. He dimly perceived that he was getting drunk. Some glimmer of caution stirred. Soon he would be hopelessly drunk. He must get away.

He shoved his chips across the bar with both hands. His head cleared enough to watch the counting of the money as it was stacked before him. He stuffed it into the remaining pockets not yet overflowing, and started staggering to the door.

He realized that his feet were not working right. As he stepped out into the dark, he stumbled. Dimly it passed through his mind:

"This is what the damned luck has meant for me—to get me rich and drunk, and then have me knocked on the head and robbed!"

Five hundred people knew that he was leaving the place alone, with loads of money. Of course, among the number there were plenty who had more than once knocked a man on the head, or stabbed him in the back, for what was in his pockets.

He stumbled on the top step, turned to right himself, fell all the way down, and rolled for what seemed a long way. Then he lay all in a heap, just conscious enough to know what was happening.

A man approached, felt in his pockets, took something out, then reached down and caught him by the neck.

He had no power to resist. He said, or tried to say:

"Good night, luck!"

V

THE next Jamison knew, he was sitting up in bed. The sun was coming in through the window. His head cleared swiftly. He was in a room—a nice room. Something was sitting there with its back to the door, and with a gun in its hand. It was Chung Yong, his China boy, fast asleep, holding Jamison's own gun.

Jamison felt something beside him—a bulge under his pillow. He dug it out. It was a sack, not of feathers, but full of bills, bills!

It all came back. They had not killed him or robbed him. It was Chung Yong who had come to him in the dark. Chung, whom he paid thirty Mexican dollars a month, had sat out there on the steps at the gambling house until four o'clock in the morning. It was Chung who had felt in his pocket—for that gun—got him into the brougham, and, with the gun ready for action, had guarded him to his hotel and to bed. Then the lad had sat with his back against the door, and with the gun in his hand, until sleep overcame him.

The ship sailed at seven o'clock that evening. At half past seven, bathed, carefully dressed, and showing no signs of his hectic night in Shanghai, Jamison went down the stairs to the dining saloon.

A girl stood waiting at the first landing, looking up at him. It was the girl whom he had encountered twice before, and in evening dress she looked more alluring than ever. He smiled and nodded. She took his arm, and they went down the remaining stairs.

Everybody in the room turned to look as they entered; and Jamison knew that the story of his winnings had preceded him. The girl, he found, had had her seat changed to beside him. As he unfolded his napkin, she rested her elbow on the table and turned to him.

"Tell me about it."

The frank admiration of her eyes and the warmth of her full lips stirred him.

"I just found a little luck," he said. "I don't know why, but it seemed that I couldn't lose."

"I said you were lucky," she nodded.

"I am, to have you for dinner companion," he returned gallantly.

She passed this without notice.

"There is a man at the table to the right," she said, without looking around. "He'll want to play poker with you. Let him alone!"

She spoke under her breath.

"Why? Is he luckier than I?"

"He is crooked as the devil."

"How do you know?"

"He used to be my husband," she replied, without hesitation.

"Then he was mighty lucky once," Jamison remarked.

"No—that was the one game in which he could not use a stacked deck. He lost!"

"All right!" smiled Jamison. "If you would rather not have me play with your ex-husband, I'll play with your future one, if you will point him out."

"Why not with me?" she asked, looking at him provocatively.

"Do you play poker?"

She nodded.

"A little."

"All right! When do we start?"

"I'll let you know." The cocktails had come, and she picked up a fork. "It will have to be arranged."

But as Jamison arose from the table, a steward approached him.

"The duke wants to meet you, sir."

Jamison went across the room, to be greeted heartily by the big Russian and introduced to his party. Twenty minutes later he was in the duke's suite, playing baccarat, a game he scarcely knew.

Nicola was a fiend at gambling. He wanted to play night and day. He had food brought to his cabin, to avoid the delay of going to meals.

The cards ran strong for Jamison. By the time the boat reached Honolulu, he had ten thousand dollars' worth of Russian gold.

The girl was waiting for him when he came on deck to go ashore. She had been waiting for him for days, but she had only caught an occasional glimpse of him between games with the duke.

"Hello!" Jamison nodded and smiled. He saw the girl was bent on vamping him, and he was not loath. "We haven't had that game of poker yet," he reminded her.

"No." A flicker of displeasure crossed her eyes, but in a moment they were caressing and beckoning again. "That can wait. You've had enough gambling for a while. How much did you lose?"

"Ask the duke," he answered. "Come on! Are you going ashore?"

It was one of the lovely evenings of Hawaii, when the moon shimmered over the palms and glinted on the low, warm swells that broke on the beach. He and the girl were standing together, looking out at the sea. Her shoulder touched his side. She leaned a little toward him. He put his arm about her, and she nestled closer.

She turned in a moment.

"I have a friend who lives here. He has a quaint house over that way." She pointed to the western part of the city. "Let's call there."

She laughed. He thought he understood her laugh, but he was not quite sure.

They had not gone a hundred yards when one of the ship's officers came hurrying after him.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jamison, but you are a doctor, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"One of our men was hurt a few moments ago. Can you come with me?"

Jamison went. He did not see the girl again until they were back on deck, and the ship was pulling up anchor.

"We must have that game of poker," he said to her, a trifle apologetically.

It looked as if he had been dodging her, and a man always feels instinctively guilty when he evades an attractive woman.

She made up the party—another woman and three men, whom she introduced to Jamison as friends of hers. He knew he was in a fixed game, but he did not care. His luck had been running so strong that he felt he could bet on it even when the cards were marked against him.

For three days they played along with small stakes, and the breaks were almost even. Jamison had seen no sign of a crooked deal, but he knew it was coming.

On the fourth evening—he had decided that this would be the last time he would play—one of the men suggested raising the ante from one dollar to five.

"Do you mind?" he asked Jamison, who sat at the end of the table, with the girl at his right.

"Make the Milky Way the limit, as far as I am concerned," responded Jamison.

"Suits me," said the spokesman. "It's a straight jack pot, with no limit."

He dealt. Evidently he dealt himself a good hand, for he won. He won three more pots after that.

Jamison got a series of poor hands, but at last somebody dealt him three nines, and he drew a fourth. He fancied that the aggressive fellow had been bluffing, and stayed with him up to a thousand dollars. At the show-down, the fellow had four kings.

The betting got stronger and stronger. Jamison had lost about fourteen hundred dollars. He pretended a nervous recklessness which he did not actually feel. Inside, he was smilingly watching for the fellow to spring his big trick.

For four deals no one was able to open, and the jack pot was sweetened ten dollars each round.

Then the aggressive one got an opening hand, and opened for a hundred dollars. Five of them stayed. The girl dropped out.

Jamison had one ace. He drew four cards. The aggressive one stood pat.

When Jamison looked at his draw, he could not believe his eyes for a moment. After one more glance, to make sure he was not mistaken, he turned his cards down, and sat waiting for the opener to bet.

The opener made it five hundred to start. The next man stayed, and Jamison raised it a thousand.

The aggressive one kicked that another thousand. All the rest were out.

These two sat looking across the table, alternately tossing two thousand dollars in bills upon it, until the jack pot looked like the window of a bank that is trying to forestall a run.

Jamison felt something tapping his foot softly. Glancing out of the corner of his eye, he saw that the girl was trying to signal to him to quit.

When there was twenty-four thousand dollars on the table, Jamison called. The aggressive one threw down four queens. Jamison displayed five aces. He had caught three aces and the joker on a four-card draw.

"Hell!" said the heavy loser, rising from the table. "I can't play against luck like that!"

VI

The game broke up. Jamison gathered the sheaves of bills, and went up on deck. It was not yet midnight, and he was not sleepy. He leaned over the rail and watched the wake of white spume in the moonlight.

A step so light that he scarcely heard it, a breath of faint perfume, the touch of an arm against his shoulder—the girl was leaning on the rail beside him.

"Doesn't luck like yours scare you?" she asked, looking into the dark green water below.

"Not this kind. It was the losing sort I had for seven years that scared me."

"What are you going to do with it?" she asked.

"What—the luck or the money?"

"Both."

"Carry it around," he answered, "as long as it lasts."

"You don't mean that you carry all that money around on your person?"

"I surely do," he laughed. "I shall get all my winnings changed into five-hundred-dollar bills, and carry them in my pockets, ready for an emergency. Believe me, when luck gives me a shove these days, I don't hold back!"

"Luck," she said slowly, "soon gets tired of playing with a fool."

"You think I am a fool?" he inquired.

"I don't know, but I know I am."

"Why?"

He turned to look at her. She was very near, and her lips were very alluring.

"I can't tell you, but I know I've lost."

She left him abruptly, and went below.

He did not see her again until the ship landed at San Francisco, the next day. He was standing at the head of the gangplank as she came by. She nodded, and, as she passed, she slipped something into his side pocket. He put in his hand and brought out a card, on which was penciled the address of an exceedingly expensive resort—one of the several spots in San Francisco to which Volstead is a stranger.

Jamison grinned.

"She's still after me!"

The boat landed in the morning. At two o'clock Jamison was out at the races. He bet on six races, and won five of the six bets.

In his room at the St. Francis, as he dressed for dinner that evening, he laid out his money on the bed and counted the bills. Three weeks ago, he had sat on the deck of the steamer, broke. To-night he counted a hundred and ten thousand dollars in American money.

He stowed sheaves of bills in various pockets. He was a fool, a double-dyed fool to carry that money—he knew it; but play-

ing safe, he had lost, and playing reckless, he had won. He felt it might be a slur on the invisible luck that had pushed him into this, if he played safe now.

He dressed and went to the number written on the card.

It was a rich dining room, with booths, and jazz, and smoke. There was a cabaret—a good one; and the last dancer, who came out amid a huzza of welcome, was—the girl of the ship.

She saw him at the table, and threw him a kiss before she began to dance.

After her turn, she came to him. He moved to a booth and ordered more drinks. Her eyes were bright; her face was flushed; she leaned close to him; her head was on his shoulder.

He ordered more drinks; and then came oblivion.

When he came to, it took him some time to orient himself. He was in a room, but where?

Bit by bit the furniture grew familiar. It was his room at the St. Francis. Then last night came back to him with a rush—the girl, the booth, the drinks.

He sprang out of bed, grabbed his clothes, which hung on a chair, and thrust his hands into pocket after pocket.

All empty!

He sank down on the edge of the bed, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hand, and went back over it all. The whole hectic three weeks—a hundred and ten thousand dollars all his—and then gone!

He sighed, shook his shoulders, got up, and took a cold bath.

After he had dressed, he went through his pockets again. There was just one dime left.

He packed his grip. He would have to explain at the desk about his hotel bill. He wondered if they would have him arrested under the law posted so conspicuously in hotel rooms.

As his hand was on the knob, there was a knock, and he opened the door.

He caught his breath in astonishment. It was the girl!

"Hello!" she said, with some concern. "Got a headache after last night?"

"No." He smiled sardonically. "I haven't even a headache left."

She handed him a small book. He took it curiously. It had the name of a bank on the back. He opened it. At the top of the first page there was a deposit memorandum in favor of Bart Jamison—\$110,376.40.

"You were so drunk," she said apologetically, "that I was afraid to leave that money on you. I hope you won't be cross about it!"

They were married that afternoon, and now they have a large and prosperous orange ranch—also a good-sized and exceedingly handsome and happy family. Jamison is vice-president and the largest stockholder of a big trust company, and makes very good speeches on the advantages of thrift and safety.

CHAINS OF THOUGHT

CHAINS of thought—they free or bind

According to the maker's mind.

If open, like a meadow starred

With daisy and with buttercup,

Garlands are formed whose links cheer up

The down at heart, yet melt the hard.

Buttercups warm, and few the mazes

That are not solved by oxeye daisies.

Chains of thought—they lift or weigh

According to their interplay.

If they be riveted to cell

Rusty and foul with sunless damp,

They drag and gall; but if a lamp

Whose flame no dream light may excel

Hangs like an altar lantern from them,

Death has no files to overcome them.

Richard Butler Glaenser

A Desperate Doll

THE STORY OF A WIFE WHO WANTED ALWAYS TO BE HER
'HUSBAND'S BABY CHERUB

By Gladys Hall

IN the beginning he told her that he liked her because she was "a baby—a doll." He confided to her that when he was a little boy he had always secretly wanted to play with dolls, but had never dared to say so because of what the other fellows would say—because, too, of what his father would say.

His father was "a man's man." His father had held verbosely that a regular boy, the kind of a boy he hoped his son would be, was the chap who played baseball and football, and smashed any other chap's nose if a fight arose. So Hugh had never played with dolls; but when he became a man—

"I still like to play with dolls," he had said, laughing; "and now I can. Now it's different. That's why I love you!"

She knew that was why he loved her. Of course, he told her other and more profound reasons; but she knew instinctively that he loved her because she was a doll. She was very young, very fragile, glazed over with innocence, very fair, and glistening gently.

Once or twice the thought came to her, back in their beginning:

"But suppose I change! Suppose I'm not a doll any more!"

Then nightmare pictures would march before her mind's eye. She thought of women she had met, women she had seen, women she had heretofore been unaware of knowing or seeing, who had waited for her to know them until now. They were women with sagging stomachs and hanging breasts, women with faded hair, women with old hands and double chins, women without laughter. She might grow to be like one of them—like all of them; and then Hugh wouldn't love her any more. She knew that!

She wasn't very deep. She didn't read a lot of books, or care about highbrow talk. Of course, being a doll, a very young doll, she hadn't needed to know these things. When she was with people who talked of deep topics, she could always laugh.

She had a darling laugh, like the glint of bird wings in the morning. When she laughed, every one smiled at her and with her; and then they, these others who were talking, were somehow made to feel rather silly and garrulous and subtly unimportant themselves. Of course, all the while it was really she, Lilla, who was unimportant; only they didn't know it.

She knew that she was unimportant. Deep down—that is, as deep down as Lilla went—she knew that she was unimportant, as people go. She couldn't do anything but be a doll. Just at first—at first after Hugh came—it didn't worry her. She was glad of it, when she thought about it at all. She was especially glad of it because Hugh loved her for just what she was—for the appealing unimportance of her, which was so very important to him.

But later on—if she should have children—if she should grow flabby and creasy and fat—

Hugh was terribly attractive to women—or so Lilla thought. He wasn't especially good-looking, either. He was no Greek god, as he sometimes very pleasantly said of himself. But the thing was, Hugh didn't need to be good-looking. He had that indescribable something called charm.

He had a touch of courtliness. He made every woman he happened to be speaking to at the moment believe that she was the one desirable woman in the world. Hugh said lovely little things to you, with his eyes, and with the gestures of his hands. Women followed Hugh with their eyes.

Hugh wasn't particularly deep, either. He didn't care much about books and psychology and that sort of thing. He said that modern women made him sick. He loved his little doll, his baby. He loved youth, and young things.

"She's a perfect little doll!" people said to Hugh, of Lilla, and then his whole face would light with tenderness.

He babied her fearfully. He kissed her tiny feet and her pink finger tips. He bought her lollipops, and laughed in adoration to see her suck them with her pursed pink lips.

She had a tiny lisp, and Hugh said that he would like to kiss each separate little word she said. He was a born lover. He would always have to have some baby girl to make love to.

On her honeymoon, Lilla wore pink and frilly things, with little bows and rosebuds of French blue.

"What, a *bride*? Why, you're nothing but a *baby*!" people would say.

Then she would pout and say to Hugh:

"But I'm your grown up wife, Hugh, aren't I?"

It sounds as if she was detestably silly; but it isn't fair to say that, because she was made so.

It must have been on their honeymoon that Lilla determined always to be a baby to Hugh. No matter how little depth she had, her silky instinct told her that to hold Hugh was to bind him with ribbons of pink and blue.

II

AFTER their honeymoon they bought a new little house in a new little suburb, and began to play at housekeeping.

Lilla was rather a nice little housekeeper. She liked things nice herself, and she kept them so. Besides, Hugh was able to provide her with an adequate maid, so that all Lilla really had to do was to lie in bed in the mornings in an adorable wrapper and cap, all fluffy and beribboned, and lisp to the maid what "Mr. Duncan would like for dinner."

They had a good time. People took them up right away. Hugh and Lilla were an attractive addition to any young community. All the women wanted to meet Hugh, and all the men wanted to meet Lilla.

The first year was sufficient unto itself. Hugh didn't get tired of babying his baby.

He spent half of his day thinking up cunning little surprises for his cunning little thing. Of course, he didn't know that the cunning little thing was spending all her time doing the same thing for him in her different way. Nor did the cunning little thing suspect it of herself, at first.

Hugh wanted her to be a baby and a doll. Hugh loved young, frilly things. She loved Hugh. That was all there was in it—all there was in life.

If Hugh should ever cease to love her—if there should ever be "another woman," like some of the horrid stories you were always reading in the newspapers and the magazines—but even the first year it didn't do to think of that. It made a little blue line come around her soft rose mouth, like thin, cruel fingers pinching it. That wouldn't do at all. She couldn't have blue lines around her mouth, or anywhere else on her face.

With some women it was different, and didn't matter. There was Miss Tillotson, for instance, who lived in the corner house. She kept house for her two brothers, and wrote articles for women's magazines in between whiles.

It was different with her. She had lines—quite a few of them. She was big-breasted and wide-hipped; but when she talked, she opened up new worlds to you, and you liked the lines and crinkles, because they were Miss Tillotson, and because you wouldn't want her any different.

She had kind hands, too, with wide palms and broad, capable fingers. She knew marvelous remedies for colds. When Lilla had a sick headache, she wanted Miss Tillotson.

Lilla couldn't open up new worlds to Hugh when she talked. She really knew nothing, except how to dance with Hugh like a bit of thistledown, and how to buy fetching frocks that would make him want to take her on his knee and dandle her there an evening through.

The worst of it was that she didn't want to do anything else. Other people made her yawn and yawn, if Hugh wasn't there.

Lilla wasn't light, really. She loved Hugh too exclusively. She loved him with a passion like a sort of bisque, which caught and hardened about her heart, shutting out the world—all but the world of dolls. So long as she could remain there, she was safe; and of course she must remain there. She *must*!

There was Florence Howe, for instance.

Florence's husband had been mad about her when he married her. Every one talked about it, and said there had never been such a "case." Then, after Florence's baby was born, Florence had changed. She had never been quite herself again. She had lost most of her hair and some of her figure. She hadn't cared to go out much. Whenever they did go to a party, Florence could be seen nudging Kimball and asking him if he didn't think they had better "run along." Baby had been fretful all day, or the new nursemaid had acted strangely just before they left.

One night Kimball had told her to run along herself—he was going to stay. A little later, with her own eyes, Lilla had seen him kissing and hugging the Temple girl, in the grocery closet!

Supposing it had been Hugh! Supposing she had seen Hugh kissing and hugging some younger, prettier, cunninger girl! What would she do? What would become of her pretty playhouse world?

That night she told Hugh about Kimball Howe.

"If you ever did a thing like that!" she wailed.

Hugh kissed her.

"Why should I, lollipop?"

III

WHEN they had been married for two and a half years, Lilla discovered that she was going to have a baby. For days she was nearly desperate with fear and premonitory terrors. Her pretty figure! Her fragile face! Her soft, massy hair! What would become of her?

She would have to do something. But what did one do? She would *have* to!

How could she be a baby, with a real baby in the house? How could she cuddle and coo with Hugh, if a real baby was with them, demanding to be cuddled and cooed over?

She told Hugh about it. Of course, she had to tell Hugh about it. She came to him, twisting her film of handkerchief and hanging her head and catching her breath in little sorrowful intakes, like some naughty child about to confess a misdemeanor. She managed to get it out in wispy gasps.

Hugh was wonderful. He saved the situation. He caught her to him and cuddled her as he hadn't cuddled her since their honeymoon, so tenderly!

He called her the sweetest baby cherub in the world. He said he couldn't imagine anything more blissful than to have two little cherubs all his own, two babies playing at being mother and child. He told her that she would be adorable, and that the only trouble was that he would frequently mistake one for the other. He said that a girl with a baby was food for angels' thoughts.

Lilla felt better. Some of the sick terror faded away. If that was the way she would appear to him—as a pink cherub fondling another pink cherub—all might yet be well. Anyhow, what could she do about it?

After all, she didn't need to be like Florence Howe. Florence had had strange ideas. She was always talking about walking so many miles each day, so that baby would have a strong constitution, or saying that she looked at beautiful pictures, so that baby would have beautiful thoughts, or discussing prenatal diets with a sort of rapt solemnity and efficiency. She always seemed to be thinking about "baby," never about herself.

Lilla needn't be like that. Lilla could think of herself. She could rest most of the time, and wear languid, fluffy things. She could sew on absurd trifles, prick her fingers, and pout and cry a little. She could be wistfully brave and gay, like a child with a cut finger, valiantly smiling over its hurt.

It wasn't as easy as she had thought, however. After the first few weeks she felt wretchedly ill and horrid. If she could have done just what she felt like doing, she would have left her hair messy and straight, and would have lain in bed and suffered; but of course she couldn't do that.

There was Hugh. She couldn't look a fright, and know that Hugh was going daily to his office, where that pretty, dark Miss Gardiner worked with such a swinging spontaneity. She had to get up in the morning, touch her pale face with a little color, fluff her hair, and slip on a *peignoir* of some fetching shade, even if it did nearly kill her to do so. You could run the water hard in the bathroom, and stifle your moans in there.

She didn't feel consciously brave about it, either. She just had to do it, because it was the one thing supremely worth doing, and one does what one must.

One night Hugh had to stay in town on

business. Lilla was in despair, and cried all evening. It couldn't be on account of some men from the West. It must be because he didn't like her being ill. Showing New York to men from the West—that meant a midnight roof, and all the gay girls there—doll girls, untouched and young—the kind of girls that Hugh liked.

Miss Tillotson was grave and kindly. She told Lilla that she was making a great mistake in "trying to keep up so." Of course, Miss Tillotson didn't understand Hugh!

Hugh said that he hoped the baby would be a girl.

"It'll be nice to have a young girl in the house," he said, "when you and I are middle-aged."

Middle-aged! If they had a daughter, a young girl, when Lilla was middle-aged, Hugh would have the contrast before him every day. They mustn't have a daughter. If they did have one, then, still more important, Lilla must never be middle-aged.

Lying in bed most of the days through, Lilla looked languidly over the women's magazines, and read all that she could find to read about rejuvenation, cosmetic surgery, face restoration, and the like. There were wonderful things you could do nowadays to keep young.

With Hugh, middle age didn't matter so much. At fifty, he would still be capable of romance. That was the way of it with men. If Lilla had to sit back in an inglenook and watch Hugh dallying with youth—well, she would die first! It would be easier to die.

Hugh was all she had—all she had ever had. Other women had fun having flirtations, and some of them had careers, but she wanted nothing but Hugh. You *had* to have the thing you wanted so intensely and so exclusively; and you could, too. You could do wonderful things these days!

A friend of Lilla's, in town, died when her baby was born. Lilla cried for hours. Supposing she should die and Hugh should marry again. He would marry another doll, another cunning little thing. She wouldn't be able to lie still in her grave! Their joined laughter and love-making would penetrate to her, wherever she was.

Lilla determined not to die. Hugh said, teasing, that she hadn't any will of her own at all; but she willed to beat death and outwit life.

"Funny child!" said Miss Tillotson. "All women have morbid imaginings."

She was very kind to Lilla, all these weary months. She came and read to her in the afternoon, and talked to her of this and that. She told of her two brothers and their little ways.

"Men like to be comfortable," she said.

"I don't know what I should do without Miss Tilly, Hugh!" Lilla told her husband.

"Yes—she's a comfortable sort," he replied casually.

Toward the end Lilla began to feel better. She felt like herself again, and yet unlike herself. It took a sort of cunning skill to maintain her dolliness when she was heavy and unskillful with her body.

Hugh told her he had never seen a woman so adorable at such a time. She kept him perpetually but always romantically sorry for her. She managed to surround herself with the aura of a princess transformed by some ogre into a shape not her own.

One comfort was that it was easy to make Hugh see things the way you wanted him to.

The baby came, and it was a girl.

The first thing Lilla asked for, when she came out of the anæsthetic, was a mirror. When she saw her reflected face, with pale, damp ringlets over her brow, quite surprisingly fragile and pretty, she smiled and dropped off to sleep. She forgot to ask about the baby—even what it was. When she awoke, two hours later, and they told her, she felt that she had known all along.

Hugh was sitting by her, and he ragged her about it.

"You didn't even ask whether we had a boy or a girl!"

He was kissing her finger tips, the way she liked him to.

"I knew it was a girl," Lilla said.

Lilla nursed the baby. She had planned not to, but the nurse told her that women who could nurse their babies, and didn't, frequently put on superfluous flesh. That settled it.

IV

TEN years passed. Lilla had begun to get heavier and plumper, after the baby was born. She never again ate naturally. Her fight against obesity, her dreadful diets, began with Joan's birth. She joined a gymnasium, bought herself a rubber suit and a

rowing machine, took treatments. Hugh bought a scale for the bathroom, and Lilla's disposition was determined by pounds and ounces.

Lilla didn't have much to do with Joan. Hugh got a nurse for her, and Miss Tillotson came over and took charge when she had measles and whooping cough. Joan loved Miss Tillotson, and was always good with her.

At ten, Joan was grave-looking and inquisitive. She wasn't a cuddlesome child. Hugh said that she was the image of his mother.

She didn't bring many of her little friends home to play. They couldn't make any noise. Mummy would be sleeping, and squeals and thumps annoyed her to tears.

One day, when she was out, Joan was in Lilla's room, with Nancy Winter. Years afterward, when the girl thought of her mother, she smelled the commingled scent of cosmetics, and remembered the army of bottles and jars and tubes in crowded procession upon the dressing table. There were fat bottles, curious flagons with twisted necks, squat jars of creams, unguents, astringents, lotions, and bleaches. There were pencils for the brows, little brushes for the lashes, tweezers, perfumes in urns with stoppers of tortoise and amber.

"What does your mother use all these for?" Nancy asked.

"To keep young with," said Joan, fidgeting on one foot.

"But she doesn't. She doesn't keep very young."

"She does, too!"

"She does not. My mother says your mother looks like a doll, and a doll can be any age."

"Mummy is young-looking!" Joan sang-songed it, as if she knew it by heart.

"She wouldn't be if she rubbed her face all off. The ladies in my mother's card club said so. I heard 'em. They say she used to be pretty, but now she's—now she's—"

"Well, now she's what, Nancy Winter?"

"I can't remember the word they used, but they laughed at her. Anyway, she's not young-looking, Joan Duncan!"

"She is!"

"She isn't! I'm going home!"

"I wish you would, Miss Fibber!"

Joan went into her room, feeling very lonely, and cried. She cried for two reasons—one about her mother, and the other

because she had called Nancy a fibber when, all the while, she was the fibber herself. Mummy was always letting her in for messes!

Joan ran down to Miss Tillotson's.

V

FIVE years passed, and Joan was fifteen. In the fall she was going away to boarding school. She was glad of it. Home was horrid! Mummy and dad scrapped most of the time. They always scrapped when they had been to a party. Then mummy cried, and then she sat in front of her dressing table, with its marching, multitudinous army of bottles fat and thin. After that she asked Joan, ten times in an afternoon, whether she looked as if she had been crying, whether she looked a "fright."

"You do, a little," Joan would say.

She was sorry to have to say it, but she simply wouldn't lie any more, the way dad did—not even to keep the peace.

Joan was still grave-looking, with steady eyes and sternly cut young lips. Hugh said she was "a personage."

"She doesn't seem like my daughter!" Lilla sighed.

"Of course not."

Hugh got the right inflection. He knew now what was expected of him, what had always been expected of him; and he almost always said what was expected of him, except when they had been to a party, and had had a scrap.

He sometimes said things with a little side wink at Joan. That always made Joan feel a little sick. It was pitiful. It was getting more and more pitiful all the while, like mummy's face, all little channels under the make-up.

Joan still took her friends to Miss Tillotson's house. Mummy was at home most of the time nowadays. She had a massage and a facial every day. Then there were the hairdresser, the manicurist, the chiropodist, and others. She took a lot of medicine, too, and it made her feel ill.

Miss Tillotson spoke to her about that.

"You're making a mistake, my dear," she said. "You'll suffer for it, later on."

"But it does keep you down," Lilla would answer. "I've got to keep my figure. You don't know Hugh, Tilly!"

"They had a party at our house last night, and your mother got frightfully squiffy."

It was Nancy Winter speaking.

"That's not all," Joan's cool voice cut in. "You can't come here any more when mummy's home, Nancy—not for a while, anyway."

"Why on earth not?"

"You must have been flirting with dad. I heard mummy say that if she ever caught him dancing three dances straight with any girl, the way he did with you last night, she'd make a scene then and there."

"She did make a scene. She always does, Joan. They let me stay up an hour, and your dad danced with me, because none of the boys in our set were there. He's a peach! He was having a rotten time, and I tried to be nice to him."

"Poor mummy! She simply went off the handle about it."

"I know why she did, really. It wasn't so much about your dad and me."

"What then?"

"She heard that young Mr. Folk say, 'Look, here comes When-Grandmamma-Was-Young!'"

"Oh, Nancy!"

"Well, it serves her right, Jo. Every one says so. You don't have any life of your own at all. Your whole house is cluttered up with cold creams and things. She won't let you have parties here, because she's afraid of your girl friends. She won't take you any place with her, because she tries to hide you. It's rotten!"

"She isn't well, Nancy. She's awfully sick most of the time, really."

"Why does she go to parties, then?"

"She thinks dad wants to."

"Oh, piffle! She makes me sick. She only wants one thing, and that's herself. She wants to be as young as we are, and she can't be, and so she hates us all for it. She looks like a false face for all her pains!"

"Nancy Winter, that 'll be enough!"

"I'm sorry, Jo, but you ought to see the facts, even if she is your own mother."

"That last is the fact you seem to overlook, Nancy Winter!"

"I don't at all. Miss Tilly's more of a mother to you than your own mother."

"I think you'd better go, Nancy. What's the use of this?"

"Very well, miss—I'll go. Like mother, like daughter, I suppose!"

Joan went up to her own room. She passed her mother's door and turned her head away. She didn't want to hate her,

but the smell of that room turned her stomach.

Joan spent most of her school holidays, after the first summer one, visiting. On her first summer vacation she brought her roommate home with her, and they had a frightful time of it. Dad was polite to Helen, and mummy cried and carried on. Helen came from an old-fashioned home, and couldn't understand it. It caused an estrangement between the girls.

Miss Tillotson was away that summer, on a fishing trip with her brother, or things might not have been so bad.

Joan didn't bring any more of her friends home for a year and a half. Then she brought Daizie Menjou, the most popular girl in the school.

Joan admitted afterward that she didn't know what she could have been thinking about. The time she had spent away from home, she said, must have dulled her perceptions. She had partly forgotten how things were. Absence had softened mummy's tantrums to figments of dreams. Besides, it was a triumph to be the one to bear Daizie off. It was by way of being a "scoop."

Dad said that Daizie was "an adorable child," and that trifling indiscretion of speech made mummy hate Daizie. Mummy followed them about on sleuthy feet, as if trying to discover something. She would come upon them suddenly, when they were sitting in the living room—Daizie and dad and Joan—and say:

"What have you been talking about?"

"Where's your father?" she frequently asked, with a suspicious inflection.

VI

ONE night at dinner—that last night—she drank too many cocktails. To Joan's horror, she began to talk like Daizie, with Daizie's slight, delicious foreign accent. She made eyes and giggled.

Hugh spoke sharply to her—it was really too much—and she left the table, with a little clatter of silver falling upon her plate. They could hear her going up the stairs, dragging one foot a little, and sobbing in her throat with painful dry intakes of breath.

They sat in strained silence.

"Your mother isn't well," remarked Hugh. "She isn't well at all. She's taking more and more of that damned medicine. It hits at the heart."

"Poor mummy!" said Joan.

That had always been the only thing she could say. She was ashamed to think how little she had ever meant it.

After dinner Daizie went to bed—with a headache, she explained. Daizie's innate tact was a part of her charm.

Joan went up and listened at mummy's door. It was locked, and from behind it there came, persistently, that dry sobbing. Joan hammered on it.

"Let me in, mummy, or I'll smash through!"

There was a fumbling at the lock, and the door was flung open, as if to say:

"Well, look at me!"

And there was Lilla, for the first time without her artifices, with a face all shrunken and seamed, like roughly handled wax.

"Like a broken doll!" thought Joan.

"Oh, mummy, why do you—why do you—"

There was pity at last.

"You don't know your father! All that I have gone through—you never will know! I've never loved you very much. I've been afraid of you; but I wouldn't want you to go through what I've gone through. Don't marry a man like your father! It's so hard, and you're all against me—beating me—bringing her home with you—"

It was a torrent of incoherencies; but Joan thought she understood. The years behind her marshaled their facts up to this point, where she could understand.

She was kneeling by the bed, cradling the twitching figure, smoothing the ridiculously bright hair.

"Mummy, dad wants you to be happy—I know that. He wants to be comfortable. He wouldn't hurt you for the world!"

"Young girls—he's always been after young girls, and you bring them here! You don't understand, Joan—you're too young!"

She said it with a little moan, and then the tears came in gushes, hard, reluctant, hateful, against Joan's soft young breasts.

Two hours later, Joan crept down the stairs to where her father sat reading. Her face was white and pitiful. Hugh Duncan looked up at her.

"She's gone to sleep," the girl said. "Oh, dad, the poor little thing!"

In the morning, they found her dead.

"She died in her sleep," Hugh said.

Joan put rouge on the thin cheeks and arranged the bright hair as Lilla would have wanted it arranged. Joan insisted upon the most charming frock, too.

"She would have wanted to be like this," she told her father.

People came and looked at her and said:

"I never knew she was so old."

"We shouldn't have let people see her," Joan said. "She would have hated to hear them say that."

When it was all over, Joan settled down at home for the winter.

"I'll take care of you this year, dad," she said. "Maybe I'll go back next year. I can make it up somehow."

The following autumn, Hugh married Miss Tilly.

Before she went back to school, Joan packed away Lilla's things—dozens of frilly frocks and silk things, dozens and dozens of jars and tubes and bottles. She cried over them a little.

"I think I'll give them away," she thought. "They've never been any use!"

LESSONS

You taught me poignant certainties

Which I shall not forget—

The clear futility of hope,

The transience of regret.

Endurance, doubt, and solitude,

Dreams that are past recall,

Denial and renouncement—

At last I know them all.

Oh, alien and dauntless things

I learned from your gray eyes,

But sometimes I could almost wish

We were not quite so wise!

Ruth Forbes Eliot

The Way Women Are

THE STORY OF A GIRL WHO PURSUED FAME AND A YOUNG MAN WHO PURSUED THE GIRL

By Edwin Palmer

A LOW-SWUNG maroon roadster sped down Fifth Avenue, swept under Washington Arch, and narrowly escaped plunging into the fountain in the middle of Washington Square. The red-haired young man who drove the roadster paid no attention to his car or to the threatened bath in the fountain. He casually turned the switch and leaped out, leaving the car in the direct path of a vitriolic traffic policeman and two buses. Hatless, the wings of his raincoat flying, and his red hair a defiant rag to the already angry "bull," he plunged on, shouting.

"Hey!" he screamed in a high-pitched voice. "Hey, Sally Hughes! Oh, you Sally! Hey!"

His voice, his manner, and especially his red, red hair were loudly suggestive of a fourteen-year-old boy in a small town calling the sweetheart of that school term. "Sally" might be any pig-tailed girl who lived on Main Street or its adjacent tributaries. To hear such a voice, to see such a manner, to observe such red hair flaunted shamelessly in a quarter of New York whose reputation for unconventionality is not wholly deserved, was unusual, to say the least.

Bobbed girls and long-haired men looked at him through their respective tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles and considered him *gauche*. Teddy Roberts, the most notoriously unconventional person in the Village, turned upon him and muttered:

"How provincial!"

In short, the manner and words of the red-haired, reckless driver of the roadster were not such as to win the approval of those who proclaim that every one must be free to live his own life. Like most self-styled apostles of freedom, they would have denied this vital and violent young man

even the wormlike liberty of existence; and certainly he should be prohibited from causing a disturbance in peaceful Washington Square.

At least nine-tenths of the young women who dismounted from the bus at its southern terminus turned to look upon the wild youth who had called a member of their sex. Some were revolutionary enough to consider him both *gauche* and *bourgeois* because of the car he sported, but by and large they were stirred by the brilliant redness of his hair and the altogether charming joyousness of his voice. Each of them, in her heart, hoped that some day a man would call her in just such a way as this fellow was calling his Sally. A man who could call a name with that joyousness and that disregard for convention would certainly be interesting.

Among the women who stood there, halted by the young man's cry, there was one who stamped her foot furiously after recognizing him, bit her lip, and turned to walk away. Elbowing her way through the little crowd, she became conspicuous; and as the man repeated his cry more loudly at the very moment when she was trying to get away, she became identified with the Sally of his eloquence.

"Oh, you Sally!" piped a little Italian bootblack. "Wait for him, Sally! He's coming running. Be a sport—wait for him!"

Blushing furiously as the laugh went up around her, the girl also started to run. The red-haired young man pursued her, still calling her name as loudly as he could, and apparently laboring under the misapprehension that her hearing was defective. The louder he called the faster she ran, heading off in a southwesterly direction toward the corner of MacDougal Street.

The irate traffic officer released the brakes of the roadster and pushed it out of the way, cursing fluently in an American dialect that sounded like Gaelic. Perspiring from the unaccustomed labor—he seldom had more to do than to raise his official hand in a lordly fashion—he now glanced up to observe the red-haired lunatic escaping from him. There were so many spectators that he seemed called upon to do something about it, and he gave chase. He was impeded in this, however, by many hilarious small boys, whose appreciation of the ancient comic device of pursuit, especially pursuit by policemen, had been tutored by the suave stars of motion picture comedies.

By this time the girl had reached the corner of MacDougal Alley. She darted past a speeding taxi into its maze of brightly-colored restaurants, studios, cobblers' shops, garages, and barns, which were once the respectable haven of weary equines, but have since been given over to playhouses without fire exits and similar cultural workshops. The red-haired man was almost at her heels. From his repeated cries and continued pursuit, it was difficult to determine whether he was the mad hero or the infuriated villain. As to the policeman, left some distance behind, it was plain that he was both mad and infuriated.

Reaching a former stable that had been "done over"—at least exteriorly—and which bore the proud sign "Penumbral Players," the girl ran into a narrow, dark door, through an auditorium with movable chairs, and up to the small stage.

A rehearsal was in progress, halted for a moment for a discussion between the designer of penumbral scenery and the stage director. The lady who had designed the scenery was even now in a penumbral state. Between puffs of a very long cigarette, with her eyes tightly closed, she was speaking in the rapt accents of a mystic.

"It's all blue to me—all blue," she was saying mournfully. "Is not that the very soul of the play, Vincent? Don't you feel as I— isn't it all blue to you, too?"

Upon the stage, Vincent also closed his eyes. This was not really necessary, however, for he was so nearsighted as to be almost blind, and he could never distinguish colors.

"Yes," he sighed heavily. "It's all blue to me, too—all blue."

Into this solemn scene burst the fresh-

faced girl who had fled from Washington Square. She was not even breathing hard after her run, but her cheeks were as red as if she were blushing, and her eyes sparkled. Not only did she break in upon the melancholy reflections of the two penumbralists, but she literally bumped into Vincent, whose slight frame was sent into the wings by the force of the impact.

Before the designer of scenery had opened her eyes, and before Vincent could even rise to his feet from the floor, where he lay gasping, the girl ran to him and appealed to his chivalrous protection.

"Save me! Save me!" she cried, throwing herself into his arms. "I am pursued! He is following me! Oh, hide me, please! Don't let him find me!"

Vincent heroically emerged from his blue dark.

"My dear Sally!" he began judiciously.

"What's all this?"

"Hey, Sally! Oh, Sally!" cried a high-pitched voice from outside.

Sally seized Vincent's hand dramatically.

"Hide me!" she whispered.

The clamor of running feet in the area-way spurred Vincent. Thrusting Sally behind him, and pointing to a door at the left, all but concealed by draperies, he told her to hide there.

As soon as she disappeared, he strode manfully across the stage to the side from which Sally had entered. He waited there for the red-haired tornado with the voice of a joyous robin. He was rewarded by being struck by the catapult of that young man's presence. Nevertheless, Vincent was resolved that no one should pass that door. He barred the way, and glared at the red hair of the pursuer.

Outside, in the orchestra, the lady with the closed eyes was still murmuring:

"It's all blue to me!"

Vincent knew now, in spite of being color-blind, that it was as red as the Bolshevik flag. Unfortunately, he proved a most ineffective barrier. The other man strode past him as if he were nonexistent.

Standing in the center of the stage, with his hair gleaming as if lighted by six "spots," the intruder looked all around for Sally. Seeing her neither upon the stage nor in the orchestra, he cupped his hands to his mouth and cried again:

"Hey, Sally Hughes!"

There being no response, except a startled scream from the designer of scenery,

the young man proceeded to investigate the stage. He peered into all the nooks and corners, upsetting some of Vincent's most cherished properties, opened dressing room doors, and continued to call the girl.

Sally remained concealed in the hiding place to which Vincent had assigned her. The door of this room was so covered that the young man missed it in his search, although he was thorough and methodical. Unluckily for him, his quest was brought to an unhappy end by the advent of the puffing policeman, who abruptly laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder and placed him under arrest for disturbing the peace, blocking traffic, violating six ordinances, and for being a suspicious character.

The young man devoted some of his abundant lung power to argument, but without result. He was led forth into MacDougal Street, amid the cries of the crowd that had followed the policeman.

"Oh, you Sally!" was the cheerful greeting that rose on all sides.

From his previous actions no one could have judged the young man shy, or diffident, or ill at ease. Now, however, in the firm grasp of the policeman, surrounded by the jeering army of the unemployed, his blue eyes took on a startled look, and his cheeks became almost as red as his tousled hair. Nonresistant and speechless, he was led away.

II

RODERICK DUNN, variously known to his friends as "Roddy" and "Reddy," appeared before the high desk of a police lieutenant, and pleaded not only his own case, but that of all lovers under the sun. His red hair was still uncovered, and his assurance had returned to him.

He explained, in the language of love and poetry, that he had not meant to violate any of the ordinances designed to regulate New York traffic. Never would he intentionally break a rule laid down by organized society and enforced by the police; but this time, he thought, the circumstances were somewhat unusual. He was sure that the lieutenant was a man after his own heart, a man who had loved and lived, a man to whom the emotional fevers and fervors of love were as clear as they are to Sigmund Freud. Therefore, with the lieutenant's permission, he would explain his apparent madness and his excusable violation of the law.

The lieutenant, believing that the proper study of mankind is man, allowed him to go on.

"Sir," said Roddy, "I am the victim of a great passion. I have been in love, and with the same girl, since I was seven years old. We have fought and made up. I have slapped her face, and she has slapped mine. We get on very well together. I have cursed her and then kissed her. She has cut me dead and then called me on the phone to say that she was sorry. Behold me now, twenty years after the birth of that love, and she is as far from me as ever—farther, in fact. Do you wonder that I am driven mad, and go through the streets shouting like a lunatic?"

"We were engaged to be married. Happy man that I was! The world was rosy, vermilion, scarlet, crimson. Life was worth living. The unattainable was about to be attained. And then what happened? Through the colossal, incomprehensible tactlessness of my estimable aunt, the young lady of my heart was informed that our marriage had been planned years ago by our respected and esteemed parents.

"What of it?" said I. "That's one thing they did well in those days!"

"Can you believe it, sir, that she then and there refused to be married to me? The romance of our love was wrecked. To her it became a dull, mercenary affair, patched up by old fogies who had never read Freud or Havelock Ellis or Ellen Key. She left me flat. You behold me flat. She came to New York—to the modern Babylon, sir—to hew a career for herself, to carve a niche in the hall of fame. She came for freedom, life, and the pursuit of solitary happiness, leaving me to my unhappy fate. I followed. For weeks I have sought her, lucklessly. To-day, at last, when I was in my deepest despair, on the point of ending it all—and that, too, would be breaking the law—to-day, sir, I saw her on a bus going down Fifth Avenue. I followed madly, forgetful of traffic rules, forgetful of all save the face that would sink a thousand ships if I had them. I called to her, and she ran. I sped after her, risking her life and mine, and she would not answer. I could not find her. And then your worthy officer came and brought me here.

"I am an unhappy man. If Sally is not for me, it would be a kindness to lock me up. Do your duty, sir, but I appeal to

your kindly and sympathetic heart. You understand me, don't you?"

The lieutenant punctuated a yawn with a long pencil.

"Sure!" he said agreeably. "I understand you—you're a nut. Lock him up, Clancy!"

After spending the night in jail, sleeping beautifully, Roddy was led into the austere presence of a rotund little magistrate. He made a still more eloquent appeal to a heart which he knew to be still more full of understanding and pity. The magistrate listened judiciously, smiled amiably, and sentenced the young man to ten days on the island.

"Thank you, sir," said Roddy. "It will be to me what Tahiti was to Gauguin. I shall make it famous!"

III

WHILE Roderick Dunn was the guest of the great city of New York, Sally Hughes spent most of her time on the stage of the Penumbral Players, or in the company of the talented director, Vincent Hopkins. Under Vincent's direction, she was to become a great actress, appearing in only such plays as would please the limited audience of penumbralists.

Vincent had expressed his artistic creed and purpose glowingly in a little yellow-backed booklet entitled "Penumbralism—What It Is?" which eventually ran into four editions of one hundred copies each. It was this booklet that reached Sally in the happy town in which she was about to become Mrs. Roderick Dunn, and suddenly brought her to the realization that she, too, was a penumbralist. After reading several recent novels in which small towns have been severely dissected and verbally destroyed, Sally knew that she was not intended for that dreary existence. She broke off her engagement to Roddy, and fled to New York to take up art.

In addition to founding the penumbralist movement, Vincent had a lucrative side line. In fact, the movement might be considered the advertising department of his regular business. Vincent was a teacher of stagecraft and dramatic art. Himself a graduate of one of the traditional schools of acting, he realized that a new naturalism had developed in the theater, and that it required a new kind of acting. He became the first teacher of the new interpretative histrionism in New York.

His method was eclectic—which is another way of saying that he borrowed, without giving credit or cash where they were due, from all the leaders in the world of the art theater. He bound the mass of his borrowings daintily together and labeled them, collectively, penumbralism. The word had a soothing sound, and he found a practical seductiveness in its appeal to women who sought art and life and freedom.

The young ladies who appeared in his infrequent and short-lived productions were without exception pay students in his conservatory of dramatic art. Outwardly there was no connection between the two institutions, but in reality a Duse or a Réjane might have knocked upon the stage door of the Penumbral Players and never have won admittance, had she not first paid the fat fee that Vincent required. To appear upon the stage of that dingy little theater was the goal of all the aspirants; and with a shrewd business acumen seldom associated with the artistic temperament, Vincent wisely postponed such an appearance until he had collected as many fees as possible.

In addition to the honor of such an appearance, Vincent held out to his students the promise of praise at the hands of a subsidized dramatic critic on the staff of a liberal but artistic weekly, which never paid its printer promptly nor its staff at all.

With such attractive bait, he found it possible to maintain a studio apartment on the north side of Washington Square and a summer cottage on Cape Cod. Publicly he declared that money was the curse of the artist, that poverty was a stimulus, and that struggle was the first law of nature.

Sally was one of his best-paying aspirants. In fact, according to his investigations, Vincent concluded that Sally was the most attractive student he had ever had. Her father, he had discovered, was the founder of the Hughes Mills, which were a vital part of a great steel company, and Sally herself had an income that was an æsthetic stimulus to her instructor's temperament. If possible, Vincent meant to acquire a great deal more than his usual fees in the case of Sally.

He knew that he was making progress, too. Why, Sally thought him a great hero when he stood up before Roddy Dunn and protected her. That incident had given him an advantage he had never hoped to win. He knew women, and he knew how they adored protectors, and all that sort of thing.

Sally, too, was greatly impressed by the art and the soul of Vincent. To her, he was a real pioneer in the theater, and the work he was unselfishly doing would take its place, in days to come, with that of Gordon Craig and Reinhardt. In fact, he transcended them, went far beyond them—so far, indeed, that the critics could not understand his work, and ridiculed it.

They were lunching in the Cerise Cow, a dim cellar lighted by candles and completely without ventilation, when Vincent told her that she would play the mad heroine of his next production, a grim but life-like tragedy translated from the Hungarian.

"You will be wonderful, Sally, as the mad girl! You see, in the past, madness has always been depicted as an abnormal, wild thing. They used to give us dark women with streaming, ragged hair and wild eyes with heavy pencil circles under them—all that sort of theatrical rubbish; but we are pioneers. We understand the new psychology. We know that madness, nine times out of ten, is supersanity. Genius—that's what it is. If I were not mad, I could do nothing. Now you shall play this wonderful rôle. You will be supremely beautiful, perfectly natural, and yet you will be completely mad. You will kill your husband—that is a tremendous scene—and six lovers. Madness, they will say; but we shall show them that your madness is the clear, unsentimental sanity of a woman fighting against those who would stifle her freedom. Why shouldn't one kill, if it is the road to freedom?"

His myopic eyes, slightly bloodshot, gleamed weirdly in the dim candlelight. Sally was calmly lifting a forkful of food to her hungry lips when his question broke in upon her dreams of stage success. Rhetorical questions always stumped her. She could never give the right answer until she had thought it over.

"No reason at all," she said at last. "I'd like to kill Roddy Dunn. I'll have no freedom until he is dead. Now there's a man who is mad—but he's not a genius."

"His is the madness of the *bourgeoisie*," pronounced Vincent, and recalled her to the production of the grim tragedy.

He had a definite purpose in giving Sally the leading rôle. Her name and her beauty would be assets, of course, but her bank account was even more important.

Before they had finished luncheon, he had impressed her with the fact that the

play could not be produced without the assistance of five thousand dollars. He would not let that stop him—never! What was money, after all? Somehow, somewhere, he would procure the money, produce the play, and make Sally a great success. He was brave, and he was an artist. He would go through with it; but sometimes—here his weary head sank upon his chest—the struggle was almost unendurable.

At this point Sally announced that she thought it only fair that she should back the play, if only as an evidence of her belief in her own ability.

Vincent feebly protested, and finally consented only because it would allow him to devote more time to the play itself, and to make it better than ever. One felt that he was making a great sacrifice for the cause of art.

Sally's check was in that afternoon's mail.

IV

AN unsubdued Roddy left the little ferry that carries prisoners and freemen to and from the island of punishment. He had enjoyed his days in prison, for Roddy's motto was:

"Never pass up a chance for a new experience."

For the first time in his twenty-seven years, he had been in jail. The thought was stimulating, for it linked him with all the heroes of romance who had similarly suffered. He knew now what those gray Russians had thought when sent to Siberia, and he could sympathize with the poor clerk of Galsworthy's "Justice."

He had found the prison not unlike the democracy of army life, except that the men were less fit. His cellmates had been quite amusing, until they rebelled against listening to Roddy's eloquent explanation of his love for Sally.

As he stepped off the ferry, his first thought was of the girl for whom, as he himself would have said, he had suffered the martyrdom and the stigma of incarceration. He wanted to tell her all about it, that she might understand to what lengths she had driven him, and so come to a realization of the intensity of his love for her; but he had also given some thought to the matter of tactics. He knew now that he had pursued Sally in the wrong way, and he tackled the problem of renewing his siege more effectively.

He hailed a taxi, and was driven to his club, where he was lucky enough to find one of its best-informed members reading a sententious review in the library. Roddy was still hatless, and madly in need of a bath, but he paid no attention to his friend's excited questions until he had made a luncheon appointment. Then he was off for a change of clothing.

At luncheon Roddy gave his friend a colorful account of his recent adventures.

"I've got to show Sally how absurd all this is," he summed up, "and get her back to sanity. Then she'll marry me—if I can knock this art thing out of her head. I've thought of a way to make her ridiculous. I'll pack the house with roughnecks who will laugh at all the wrong places—"

"My dear infant," interrupted his friend, smiling condescendingly, "if you had had only a tithe of my own wide and varied experience with women, you would be aware that it is impossible to make a woman know when she is ridiculous. If you try that, first thing you know Sally will become a confirmed Villager, and take up free love or something."

"Remember, you are speaking of the woman I am going to marry!"

"If she'll have you," added his friend. "Now listen to me. Out of my profound wisdom, let me speak. Don't make her ridiculous. Make her a success—a serious, genuine artistic success. Finding it easy to attain, she won't want it. Then, perhaps, if you don't throw yourself at her, she'll want you. That's the way women are."

He proceeded to outline a program of action. He offered himself as publicity man extraordinary, and promised to secure the assistance of all the critics, editors, and producers he knew. Roddy felt that the thing was getting beyond him, but it sounded plausible, and he had to admit that he knew nothing of women, except that he loved Sally, and so—

Came the première of "A Woman Free." Roddy's friend was so active that he even persuaded the conductor of a humorous column to give up a parody he had written, called "A Woman Freak." In other ways, too, he was successful. Sally's artistic photograph—a vague, shadowy, soft-toned thing that bore no resemblance to Sally's healthy self—was published in half a dozen magazines, and pictures of the stage settings for "A Woman Free" were extensive-

ly reproduced. The pens of the satirists wrote of other things, and the typewriters of the cynics were sabotaged out of use. Only the serious and the faithful were allowed to comment upon the play. It and Sally were being made famous.

The audience that witnessed the first night was as carefully selected as a jury. The scornful were excluded, and the seats they might have had were given over to out-of-work actors hired to look intellectual and to applaud at the right points. Never did a play have a better audience.

Entering the theater just as the lights went out before the curtain rose, and taking a seat far to the back, Roddy felt happier than he had since the day when he first saw Sally after weeks of searching. His plan had worked, thus far, without a hitch, although it had been expensive.

The curtain rose on a lugubrious scene, but Roddy didn't look at the stage. His attention was centered upon the rows of seats in front of him. Well down toward the stage he saw one of America's greatest theatrical producers. This man had lent his mighty presence, and would later condescend to bestow his favor upon the play and its star, as a result of the work of Roddy's friend.

There is little need to describe the drama or its performance. Its like has been solemnly produced time and time again, and will continue to be produced so long as there are men like Vincent Hopkins and rich young women to play angel to their productions. It was a harrowing affair, and Sally, as an emotional peasant woman, was woefully miscast.

The audience was far better than the play, and the best acting was done by those "out in front." With the exception of a veteran who had played with Edwin Booth, and who was now too weary to keep awake, every one was tremendously appreciative. Sally and Vincent won curtain call after curtain call. Vincent was finally forced to make a speech, and not even that broke the tense seriousness of his auditors. They were worshiping at the shrine of beauty.

Sally was a success. The great producer offered her a contract. Her time was divided between interviewers—whose activities were liberally stimulated by Roddy—and appreciative worshipers. Swarms of amateur dramatists besieged her, asking permission to read their plays. Sally got very tired of it all, and she was especially

tired of Vincent Hopkins with his eternal talk of "I told you so!"

She was wise enough to know that success which had come so easily wasn't worth having, and she began to feel that the people who applauded her as a great artist were silly. She knew that she hadn't changed a bit, and yet there wasn't one of her new friends who treated her as a regular human being. Art and freedom and eternal adulation were rapidly becoming dreadfully tiresome.

V

THINKING of all this as she walked in Washington Square, just after she had turned down the proffered contract because it meant a repetition of the stupid round, and had refused to marry Vincent because he had become an insufferable bore, Sally's heart gave a leap of joy when she saw a maroon roadster speeding along at its usual wild pace.

She laughed heartily for the first time in days—not the restrained laugh of a great tragédienne, but with the gay happiness of youth.

"Oh, Roddy!" she called. "Hey, Roddy!"

The red-haired young man brought the car to a stop, looked around, and got out. He stood with his cap in his hand, his hair gleaming, as the girl approached. She came running up to him with a smile flashing and her eyes alight.

"How do you do, Miss Hughes?" he said.

"Miss Hughes! Don't be absurd, silly! Take me for a ride, will you? Take me any place—out in the country, if there's any country left besides Hungary!"

"Charmed," agreed Roddy, and held the door open for her.

He was as courteously silent as any of her interviewers, as worshipful as any Villager. She became furious with him.

"What's bitten you, Roddy? Can't you talk any more?"

"Eh? Oh, yes! I beg your pardon. You see, when a girl I've known all my life suddenly does something tremendous, and becomes famous, great, successful, why, you know, it makes a duffer out of a chap like me. I've never done anything, and you're a great actress. It's rather a blow, you know, when I thought that some day—oh, well, I can see now that you're far beyond my reach."

"*Et tu, Brute?*" Roddy, you've disappointed me. I never thought that of you. I wish you wouldn't be ridiculous. When I saw you, I thought I could get away from all the nuts and hear some one talk sense again. How are the new puppies? Did you buy the pony you saw at—"

A sudden change came over the young man. He thrust his chin forward, and his hair seemed to burn brighter than ever.

"You want to hear some one talk sense, do you? Well, here goes! I want to tell you that as an actress you're the worst I've ever seen in fifteen years of show-going. As for that play, it's beyond words—impossible. Hopkins's direction was appallingly stupid, the sets were terrible, and the theater smelled of cheap disinfectant. The place should have been pinched. You were utterly absurd. Your enunciation was bad, your speaking voice is untrained, you have no stage presence, and as a tragedy queen you're funny. That's what I think of your career and your success and everything you gave me up to win. Well, you can have 'em. If you're going to make yourself ridiculous this way, I'm darned glad you didn't marry me!"

He suddenly felt two arms about his neck and soft lips pressed against his. Regardless of them, he concentrated upon steering the roadster.

"Attaboy, Roddy! That's just what I think myself!"

He turned incredulous blue eyes upon her.

"Do you mean that?" he demanded.

She nodded emphatically.

"All right, then," said Roddy. "If you'll cut out all this nonsense, I'll consent to marry you; but I'll be darned if you ever get on a stage again!"

Her arms held fast, and love was in her eyes. Roddy was almost overcome by her complete surrender; but he thought of something that he had not told her.

"That is," he went on, "if you'll marry an ex-convict!"

"I will—when it's you," she said.

When Roddy told his friend about it, that learned man nodded thoughtfully.

"That's the way women are," he said out of his wisdom. "But never let her know how she became a success, or you'll have her back on the stage, fighting to make good on her merit, and prove that we're all in the wrong. That, too, is the way women are!"

The Bullfighter

A ROMANCE OF THE THRILLING SPORT OF THE ARENA

By T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright," "East Is East," etc.

XIX

RAFANEL'S dissertation on the right and wrong of marriage did not convince even Socorro Jimenez; but it soothed and comforted the girl, and lent her a certain moral support, to know that her brother upheld her course. Still, there was no escaping the fact that it was very, very wrong of her to sit in the garden with Señor Angel and allow him—nay, virtually invite him—to kiss and embrace her, as she had done.

After she had returned to her room that night, the enormity of her conduct so grew upon her and shamed her that she could not even remember how Rafael had arranged the logical members of his syllogism to make her appear in the right. Finally, restlessness routed her out of her chamber and sent her over to Rafael's study, for a restatement of the grounds of her defense.

But Rafael had that mercurial type of mind which never repeats a formula. This time he justified his sister's conduct by telling her that all human life was a compromise between the laws of society and the individual will. The objects of these two forces were usually diametrically opposed. Any social body made an effort to preserve itself, and that was the reason for the convention forbidding marriage outside of one's own circle. On the other hand, the individual was impelled toward *mésalliances* to reinvigorate the original human stock with the increased vitality of a mixed breed. So all human life whirled about these cross currents—aristocracies tending to destroy life and preserve social forms, the individual tending to renew life and destroy social forms.

"Now that is why an outside marriage

pleases a girl and shocks her family," said the poet, smiling.

"But which is right and which is wrong?" demanded Socorro, with the feminine desire for a rule of thumb.

"My dear sister," laughed Rafael, "if you want a commandment, go to the priests. If you want to do as you please, come to the philosophers."

That was all she could get out of Rafael—nothing very definite or satisfactory. However, the *señorita* was not really unhappy. Inside of every woman run two distinct codes, and her fealty shifts from one to the other with the exigencies of her life.

Socorro made her brother promise to go and tell Angelito the family's decision early next morning. Then Rafael kissed her, wished her, rather tamely, any happiness that her proposed marriage might bring her, and sent her away to her own room, while he resumed the grave task of putting into Spanish verse his thoughts on the subject of glands.

Whatever was the disturbance in the Jimenez family, Angelito's pain was more acute than Socorro's, because his sense of loss was more fundamental. It seemed to him that he had irretrievably lost the girl he loved.

He went to sleep with this hag riding his heart. At intervals, all night long, he would struggle out of the vague and symbolic torments of his dreams into a gray hopelessness of ever possessing Socorro Jimenez. In his twilight state of lethargy, desire and tenderness flooded him. His memory became an inquisitor which tortured him with endless repetitions of the kisses he had received in the garden, of the softness of her flesh, of her arms about his

neck, of the faint fragrances of her hair and body.

These graces, these refinements, these perfumes, this voluptuousness, were in conjunction with the sweetest and simplest innocence. They blended in him a fever of desire and a surpassing tenderness—the unstable combination of a lover. Her phantom came and lingered beside him with an aching sweetness.

Amid the pain of his longing and his hopelessness, the music of the "Hymn of the Sun" slowly reestablished itself in his sleep-drugged brain—that strange, melancholy movement, the repeated, delicately modulated cadenzas, which were like sad questions asking:

"Can this be love? Is this endless grieving passion? Oh, night, does your sea-blue bowl hold only the waters of desire and sadness and despair?"

The music beat in the bullfighter's brain. By slow degrees his thoughts became bent and distorted with returning sleep, and presently his consciousness was filled once more with the *jacquerie* of dreams.

When Angelito arose, at eight o'clock next morning, the braying of donkeys in Traposo Calle, the cries of the street vendors, the sound of his mother rattling pots in the kitchen, tempered somewhat his nocturnal impression that all existence centered in and ended with Socorro Jiminez. The bustling, matter-of-fact sounds suggested a certain possibility of life proceeding without her.

His bath helped him. In a shower bath, muscles become an end in themselves. The sunshine slanting among the pink columns of his *patio* suggested peace, if not joy. The black coffee his mother served him at the breakfast table revived in him a faint hope that his suit had not been utterly rejected.

Rafael had promised to come and tell him the family's decision. However, if the decision was adverse, he did not expect young Jiminez to come. Among the Latins all couriers bring good news, or they bring no news at all. Almost unconsciously Angelito began listening for the doorbell. If the bell should ring—if Rafael should come—

As he sat sipping his coffee, with rather a drugged feeling from his unwholesome night, there really came a clanging at his door.

The bullfighter upset his coffee. A shock

went through every nerve in his body. Old Ana, who had been smoldering at her son ever since he entered the kitchen, now burst into eruption.

"*Caramba*, look at you—jumping as if that was your passing bell! I knew you were waiting for somebody or something—a woman, a baggage, some *señorita* who doesn't care two *centesimos* for you, but is after your bolivars!"

"*Diantre!*" cried Angelito. "Go to the door and see who it is! Don't stand there sputtering all day!"

The bullfighter had half risen, but he controlled himself and sat down again. The ring of the bell could mean only that Rafael had come with an affirmative answer. He tried to take some coffee from his shaking cup into his dry mouth.

"Go on!" he managed to say. "Don't stand there all day!"

Old Ana turned and shuffled off through the *patio* with an obstinate plopping of her *alpargatas*. Angelito watched intently as she disappeared among the columns. After a prolonged wait she reappeared, wearing a sardonic smile in the wrinkles of her weather-worn face.

Angelito watched her anxiously, wondering whom she had seen and what she had done. He thought, with trepidation, that it was not one whit beyond her to refuse Rafael admittance to the house, or to tell him that Angelito was not at home. She might do anything.

She came plopping back with her enigmatic grimace, and then, when she was quite close to him, she drew from behind her a damp copy of a newspaper and flung it down on the table in front of her son.

"There's your *Sol y Sombra*," she snapped. "That's what you were spilling your coffee and kicking the table over about! The boy had brought your *Sol y Sombra!*"

Her sardonic smile grew sourer, and she turned, with a shrug, to her pots again.

Angelito felt the peculiar tightening of the chest that comes of a sharp disappointment. He made an effort to hide this from his mother. He took up the paper mechanically, and unfolded its limp pages.

Over the front page was spread a long description of Juan Leon's fighting bulls, and the complicated methods by which the animals were prevented from seeing a human being from the day when they were calved until the moment when they charged

into the arena with barbs sticking in their shoulders.

Angelito could not read the article. The desolating fact that the Jiminez family had decided against him made reading impossible. He stared at the page, and his eyes picked out isolated phrases:

Raised on the loneliest haciendas—driven by night to the railroad—shipped to the arena in closed cars—driven blindfolded to the *circo*—imagine the fury of a thoroughbred fighting bull when confronted for the first time in his life, in the glare and uproar of the arena, by his natural enemy, man!

Angelito's brain functioned sufficiently for him to know that he was reading about the coming Spanish *corrida*. He began planning some sort of reprisal for his treatment by the Jiminez family.

In the coming *corrida* he was to be second *espada*. He determined that when that moment came, he would carry his part through with such spectacular daring that Spanish impresarios would invite him to the *circos* of old Spain; that eventually he would be making a world tour with a shipload of fighting bulls. Then, when the Jiminez family saw that they had rejected a world-famous man, he could imagine their sensations!

But then he thought he might make Socorro unhappy, and he did not want to do that. The very suggestion of Socorro filled Angelito with a melting tenderness. He would never be allowed to marry her, but even so he would always love her. In the bullfighter's heart there grew up a dim vision of a tenderness and a love for a woman which could persist quite without marriage or any physical contact.

As he sat thinking on this new and wistful possibility, he recalled tales he had heard the priests tell of saints in old times, who loved with all the ardor and passion of earthly lovers, and yet were monks. That was a strange thing, love divorced from flesh; yet here in his own heart he heard its possibility reiterated.

He was thinking wistfully on this point when he heard his name called from the *patio*.

The bullfighter looked around, straightened, then stared. Rafael Jiminez stood in the *patio*, at the entrance of the kitchen, smiling at him. Such a sudden flood of happiness swept over Angelito that he could hardly find his voice.

"Rafael! It's you!" he cried in an

amazed voice. "Does it mean that I am fortunate? *San Pablo, hombre*, don't stand there laughing like that!"

Rafael spread his hands.

"How do I know whether you are fortunate or not? You are accepted. That's not the same thing. Send old Ana off on an errand, *mi amigo*, and we will have a little talk."

Angelito glanced at his mother uncertainly, and delayed action a trifle by asking Rafael how he got into the *casa*.

"I found the door unlocked. I thought, everything considered, that I might walk in unannounced."

The bullfighter was more delighted than ever at this brotherly approach in Rafael.

"Sit down here by the table," he invited rapturously. He turned to his mother again with some of his rapture vanishing. "Ana," he said, with some hesitation, "you might go to the market now and buy our *comida*."

"Yes," interposed Rafael, drawing a coin from his pocket at the obstinate set of the old woman's face. "Take this, Ana. Buy one of your lottery tickets and keep it for yourself. You might draw a fortune."

He handed a five-bolivar piece to the crone. The old woman took the silver sulkily, and started off, muttering. Then, suddenly, she broke into the violent obscenity of a peon enraged, and flung it on the tiles.

"Ana!" cried the bullfighter furiously, fearing lest this outburst might break off his delicate negotiations with Rafael.

Old Ana went on, and the two men looked after her.

"Servants get like that when you keep them too long," observed Rafael. "They get to owning you. I shouldn't be surprised if, when Socorro comes here, you had better get rid of the old virago and hire another girl."

"Yes—yes," hesitated Angelito. He jumped up and rushed over to his companion. "Friend of my soul!" he cried. "I can hardly realize that I am the accepted lover of your sister, that Socorro will be my bride!"

He threw his arms about his friend's neck, and kissed him on both cheeks. The crippled youth smiled faintly as he accepted the bullfighter's caresses.

"My dear Angelito, I assure you that your pleasure is hardly greater than my own."

"I can hardly comprehend it!" glowed the *torero*. "*Hombre*, a saint out of heaven would not be more welcome! To think of my amazing good fortune!"

Rafael patted him on the shoulder, and moved toward a chair at the table. The *espada* went on in his ebullient mood.

"*Caramba*, but I was a despairing man, Rafael! I was afraid that my—er—sitting in the garden would prejudice the *señora* against me."

"It did," admitted Rafael frankly.

"And it prejudiced the *Señorita Margarita*, too, I suppose—I could see that much last night."

"*Cà, naturalmente*, it did," agreed Rafael dryly.

"I saw that, so you can imagine how I spent the night, dear Rafael. *Diantre*, a night of torture! To fling away by my own act the most beautiful, the tenderest, the most virtuous—"

"My dear Angelito," laughed Rafael, "if you hadn't committed your indiscretion in the garden, you would never have gained *maman's* consent to your suit."

"I gained the *señora's* consent by acting improperly?"

"*Seguramente*, it forced her hand. You know the conventional penalty for such a peccadillo is the marriage of the offending parties, Angelito. It would never enter my mother's head to question that convention, to question the wisdom of giving my sister to a breaker of the rules of conduct."

"It is rather a queer punishment," admitted Angelito, who had never thought of it before, "to insist that a lover should take what he most desires. Since you mention it, I wonder what your mother meant by that."

The poet waved a finger.

"*Nada!* My mother meant nothing at all. She simply followed a convention as automatically as an insect follows its instincts. By the way, have you ever thought that the conventions of society and the instincts of animals are exactly analogous?"

"No, I never did; but your mother—"

"There is a convention here in Caracas that a youth and a maiden who have enjoyed dual solitude in a garden must marry. Why they should marry, or how their marriage can cancel their indiscretion, is a matter not to be questioned by a woman. It is accepted as a miraculous fact, like the transubstantiation."

The poet's satirical flavor disturbed An-

gelito in his new happiness. The suggestion that he had in the slightest degree compromised Socorro pained him. He wanted her to appear to the world, as she appeared to him, adorned with a sort of celestial purity.

A line of reasoning popped into his head to prove that she still retained her transcendental estate.

"But *mire*, my friend," he began, "listen to this—if there is a convention that two persons shall marry after certain things have happened, then that shows that Socorro has never really stepped outside of the conventions, for there is a rule governing her case."

The crippled youth began laughing again.

"You really are in earnest, I suppose, about wanting my sister to be a very paragon of propriety!"

"*Seguramente, señor.*"

"I fancy you never had a sister."

"No."

"I thought not. They don't come like that. However, listen—I will give you a more comfortable way of looking at conventions than what you have. You place too much accent on conventions, and too little on persons. You have observed that some conventions are a little flexible, as in your own case. Why is that?"

"*Cà!* To save us suffering, I suppose."

"Not at all. It is because the persons who break that particular convention are the most ardent, and therefore the most valuable individuals of our race. Their offspring will be the most vigorous, and will have the greatest share of the *élan vital* which propels life to its mysterious goal. So, you see, this whole disturbance is the very greatest compliment that could be paid you. Instead of holding the episode in regret, you should wear it upon your sleeve as a decoration."

"*Caramba*, what an idea! And did your mother think of all that? She must be the wisest—"

"My mother think of it? *Diantre*, no!" cried Rafael, amazed. "That is simply the rational foundation at the back of her instinct. She submits to it with ill grace and much complaining, but if I should tell her why she submits to it, she would think I had gone utterly insane."

"Then, *diablo*, why does she—"

"My dear fellow, how does a bee fly straight to its hive after wandering and

turning among flowers all day? Women are the custodians of life. They divine its necessities. They sacrifice themselves, their kin, their loves, their ambitions, and even their vanity, at its behest. My dear Angelito, it is a miracle. It is the finger of God!"

The two men sat for some moments in silence.

"I shall tell that to Socorro," the bullfighter said, after a time. "I know it will make her happy."

The poet held up his finger.

"Don't do it. Human beings, Angelito, are occupied mainly in justifying their actions to themselves. A man always saves his face by reasoning away his peccadilloes. A woman dismisses hers according to how she feels. That is why every reconciliation between the sexes must be based on simple forgiveness. They have no mutual ground for explanations."

"Then I had better not mention this to Socorro?"

"No—she already feels perfectly at ease about her conduct. The best thing you can do is to assist her in forgetting it."

Rafael picked up the copy of *Sol y Sombra* which Angelito had dropped on the table, and glanced idly through the paper. The bullfighter sat glowing over his suddenly changed prospects.

Into what a family he was marrying! His brilliant brother-in-law, his heavenly wife, even his aristocratic mother-in-law! What a step up for a peon boy born in the slums of the Matadero!

His pleasant musings were interrupted by an exclamation from Rafael.

"What is it?" asked the bullfighter.

"*Diablo*, listen to this!" cried the poet, and in a voice trembling with wrath he began reading an article from the paper:

A CALL TO PURITY

Aristocrats of Caracas, take heed! We have been too lax in our solidarity. We have been negligent guardians of the sacred blood of the old Conquistadors. Into that pure stream is draining turgid, bestial peon blood, which is stultifying our lineage, dulling our intellects, corrupting our manners, and debasing our morals.

Lacking in breeding, courtesy, aplomb, and gentility, the social scum which chance has thrown into our midst does not hesitate to go to the extremes of indecency in order to force itself into matrimonial alliances with the aristocratic families of this city.

Not long ago the writer of this article had the painful experience of seeing a certain peon, who has some notoriety as a bullfighter, seated at mid-

night in a garden with a *señorita*, unaccompanied by any *dueña*.

This young woman has hitherto been of the most honorable repute, as well for her modesty as for her beauty and talents. Without doubt this scurrilous killer of bulls—it would be too great a compliment to call him a *torero*—inveigled the young lady into this compromising position, but for which her family would never have countenanced the low and vicious purpose of forcing his marriage to the unfortunate *señorita*—a marriage otherwise impossible.

With such contemptible devices, fellow aristocrats, is the *canaille* intrrenching on our racial purity. Such conduct is worse than seduction. Seduction slays one individual; *mésalliances* contaminate the race. Such unions should be ostracized by society and banned by our holy church.

During Rafael's passionate reading the bullfighter sat listening with vague comprehension. All that he gathered distinctly was that a bullfighter had sat in a garden with a *señorita*. This much of the philippic came home to him with a certain familiarity.

"Who wrote it?" he asked.

"Who should write it," cried Rafael, "but Narciso Montauban?"

"What did he say about a garden?" inquired Angelito.

"*Diablo*, he publicly accuses you and my sister of sitting in a garden together at midnight!"

"*Cà*, that is a fact!" ejaculated Angelito uncomfortably.

"*Fuego!*" cried Rafael, striking the table with his fist. "What if it is a fact? Is Montauban to be allowed to publish every indiscretion my family commits?"

"Did he really say us? I didn't hear any names."

"He said that a *torero* had induced a *señorita* to sit with him in her garden. You know everybody will know whom he is talking about!"

Angelito frowned, but in his heart he could not help feeling pleased at the distinction. Such a tale would cast a certain glamour over him in the *circo*. However, he frowned and growled out:

"*Caramba*, I am clear enough, but by good fortune your sister's name is not mentioned."

"*Hombre!*" cried Rafael. "He couldn't have made it plainer. He says that you are going to marry her, and that such a thing is worse than if she had been an indecent woman."

The bullfighter half rose.

"What—Socorro worse than a common baggage?"

"Here he says it!" replied Rafael, striking the paper.

"Socorro an indecent woman!" A sudden quaking wrath went through the bullfighter's powerful body. "May the lightning of God strike him dead! I'll go down and break every bone in his—"

The peon started impulsively for the *calles*, his nostrils expanded, ready to smash his enemy. Rafael saw that he was really leaving the *casa*, and limped rapidly after him.

"Here, what are you about?" he cried.

"I am going to the office of *Sol y Sombra* to smash that snake!" he cried.

"Stop! You can't do that!" warned the poet.

"Why can't I?"

"You can't go into a man's office and start an ordinary street brawl!"

"Hell's sacred devils, I can, and I'm going to!"

"Angelito, you'll disgrace yourself. You would be the butt of everybody's scorn. It isn't done!"

"But I am going to whip him! I'm going to smash him to bits—calling Socorro Jimenez a baggage!"

"That's all right, that's proper, but you'll have to challenge him formally. You can't go blundering into his office, breaking up the furniture, and getting yourself arrested and dragged to the police court. You must challenge him as one *caballero* challenges another."

Angelito controlled his wrath, with a sensation as if again some one had checked his mighty muscles with the trivial threads of wont and custom.

"When will we get to fight?"

"Your seconds will arrange that."

"I'm going to fight him and kill him!" roared the bullfighter, as if Rafael opposed the idea.

"You are quite right in that, Angelito. It will clear up your record as a man of honor and reinstate my sister's good name. Just how it does it, I don't know; but it does. It's another miracle, I suppose, like the loaves and fishes. Anyway, I'm glad to see you take that course. I had thought of challenging Montauban myself, but it's better to come from you."

"Yes, yes!" agreed Angelito sharply. "That's right!"

"Now the question is, what arms are you the most skillful with—swords or pistols?"

The bullfighter came to a halt and considered the question.

"I suppose I'm best with swords."

XX

WITHIN the next forty-eight hours all Caracas was gossiping about the article in *Sol y Sombra*, and speculating on the outcome of the Angelito-Montauban duel.

The bullfighters at old Malestar's wine shop predicted a swift disaster for the editor.

"The fight will depend," gesticulated Ercolito, pushing out a double-nine domino, "upon how long Angelito cares to play his man. He will lure him on for three or four rushes, perhaps half a dozen, and then—*pou!* It is a great pity, because Señor Montauban has talent, and has given us all very good press notices."

The crowd began to speculate who would be the next editor of *Sol y Sombra*.

Among bullfight devotees in the down town districts, the jeweler stepped into brief prominence because he had sold Angelito his plate. This gave the merchant a certain authority on the *torero's* prowess as a swordsman.

"*Caramba!*" he would say, with a shrug. "What chance has an ordinary man against a trained athlete? Fighting skill is like all other skill, *señors*, it comes with seasoning. Look at me in this business. If a diamond has a flaw in it, be assured that I will detect it at a glance. The years, *señors*, the years make us—fighter, editor, jeweler, what not. The years are like molds which inclose us ever so softly at first, but they become like stone."

"Perhaps it is Señor Montauban's way of committing suicide," suggested an old *caballero* with a skin like parchment. "He is young enough to prefer death to the loss of a *querida*. The young trip to death lightly, *señors*, as if to their partners at a *baile*. Later, when death comes quite close, and you can see his features—"

The old gentleman lifted his shoulders and his brows, and drew down his lips, to deprecate such folly as seen from his maturer point of view.

In the Jimenez villa in Paraiso, it was Señora Jimenez who was most often vocal. She pointed out to Socorro, to Margarita, to Rafael, innumerable times, what came of receiving a bullfighter into the family—an instantaneous challenge, a precipitate attack. Holy Virgin, he would be forever

fighting and murdering men! They would never have any peace with such a member in their home!

"But, *maman*," Rafael would interpose, "he had provocation enough. Montauban wrote an article—"

Narciso write such a thing? She would never believe it. If he did, did he not have provocation? For Socorro to give him the mitten like that? How he must have suffered! How he had loved Socorro! And now to be flung over for a bullfighter who goes about flinging challenges without cause!

Here the *señora* would weep in a peculiar manner, holding her face almost still, so as not to wrinkle her smooth, girlish skin, but with the tears trickling out of her eyes. She had practiced this mode of weeping so long that she did it without effort. She was weeping for Narciso, whom she desired for a son-in-law, for his standing in Paraiso would add prestige to her family. Now all her plans had gone awry on account of a peon bullfighter! It was enough to make a good woman weep!

Socorro Jimenez avoided her mother's endless reproaches, as well as she could, by finding tasks in the sunshine of garden or *patio* which her delicately blooming mother carefully avoided.

The impending duel hovered like an incubus over the girl's nights and days. It seemed unreasonable that Narciso Montauban was going to fight over her. Such a thing was in character with Angelito, but Narciso! She couldn't understand it at all. She couldn't think what had come over him.

In her imagination the two men fought all day long. She could see the big *torero* and the little editor making swift lunges at each other. One of them would be killed—the editor, of whom she was fond, or Angelito, whom she loved.

The possibility that Angelito might be killed filled her with the utmost terror. She felt like going to Narciso and telling him that he must by no means hurt Angelito. It still seemed to her that she would have her old sway with him, that he would give up to her out of habit, as he had always done.

But her reason taught her that that was untrue, that he and Angelito were actually fighting over her. Her innocent girlhood had somehow broken down, and had dropped her into the black and tortured

currents of life and passion, whose very existence she had never suspected.

One noon the girl stood in the *patio*, binding a new orchid to a piece of wood, in order to root it; but her thoughts were plodding the treadmill of the duel. Presently Rafael came limping from his room. Socorro watched his painful walk, and it filled her with pity. His lameness had somehow taken the edge from his youth.

As he paused to watch her fix the epiphyte to its host, he said that he had been over on Traposo Calle.

"How is Angelito?" she asked, looking at her flower and coloring faintly.

"In the most insolent health, as usual."

"I mean is he uneasy about—"

With a little gesture she signified the fight.

"Not as much as you are, I'm afraid, poor little *muchacha*," said the poet sadly.

"Then he is—a little?" asked the girl apprehensively.

"Pues, no—he's not."

She looked at her brother suspiciously.

"What do you mean by saying 'he's not' like that?"

The poet paused undecidedly.

"I hardly know whether to tell you."

Socorro became alarmed at once.

"You'll have to tell me now," she said in a low tone.

"*Si-í, naturalmente*. The truth is that I—I am a little disappointed in Angelito."

"*Anda! How?*"

"It's an odd thing. Still, it's simple enough after you understand it. The fact is that he is not a very good swordsman."

"Not a good swordsman!" She stared blankly at her brother. "That can't be, Rafael! An *espada* not a good swordsman!"

"Yes—you see, he has never used the rapier for any other purpose than in the bull ring. He never took lessons with the foils. He—hardly had an opportunity. You probably know that he was a poor boy." Rafael paused, and presently added, in a slightly different tone: "I thought I had better tell you."

The blood receded slowly from the girl's face as the full implication of her brother's warning grew in her mind. She laid the half-bound orchid on a flower box.

"Rafael, do you *know* that he can't use a sword?"

"*Absoluto!* I carried down my foils, to give him a little practice, and to explain a

few little thrusts which I know Montauban possesses; but"—Rafael spread his hands hopelessly—"it was no use. He knew nothing about the foils at all. I could touch him at will."

"Then Narciso will—kill him?" whispered the girl.

The poet made a helpless gesture.

"Narciso may possibly wound him and spare his life. I have always found him a generous fellow; but, of course, in an affair of this kind—"

The girl flushed.

"Oh, Rafael, *don't* say 'affair' like that! It sounds so shameful!" She stood with a look of shame and distress in her face. "Why did Angelito go flinging out a challenge, if he is not a swordsman?"

"Pues, it was thrust on him, in a way. When he read the attack on you in *Sol y Sombra*, he leaped up and said that he was going to throw Señor Montauban out of his own window. Of course, that was impossible. I told him that a man couldn't commit such a—"

"Why was it impossible?" cut in Socorro. "That was the very thing to do!"

"Go in and raise a disturbance like a street bravo?"

"Wouldn't that be better than being killed?"

Rafael made an annoyed gesture.

"*Caballeros* don't go about mauling persons with their fists. Such a thing would be absurd, impossible!"

Socorro gave up that point.

"Let's stop this duel, Rafael!"

"If Montauban would apologize—"

"Why couldn't Angelito apologize?"

"*Demonio*, Socorro!" cried the poet, outraged. "Apologize because he resented an insult to you! *Huy!* He would far better be killed!"

"*Madre in cielo!*" gasped the girl, giving up this defense in its turn. "This is the most brutal thing I ever dreamed of! This duel is about me, but no one gives me or my wishes a thought. Angelito goes out and is killed to protect my honor! What good will my honor be to me if Angelito is killed?"

Sudden tears stung Socorro's eyes. The cripple put an arm about his sister.

"Don't exaggerate your danger. I wanted to give you a little warning, so that if Angelito was wounded it would not be too great a shock. He will hardly be killed. That doesn't happen often. Besides, An-

gelito is one of the most powerful and active men I have ever seen."

Rafael was inducing his sister to walk with him toward her room, but his instinct to philosophize impinged on his consoling attitude, for presently he added:

"The difficulty is that Angelito is stepping outside of his class to marry. That is his real tragedy. Among all classes of society men fight for the women they marry. Some men here in Caracas fight with family prestige, some with their wealth, some with their art. The peons fight for their women by kicking and butting. You see, Angelito has climbed up into a new stratum, and so, when he attempts to mate, he meets a new method of fighting—one in which he is not at all trained, and at which he may possibly lose. He is under that natural handicap."

Suddenly the girl began to weep outright.

"Oh, how horrible this is! How horrible! They think nothing at all of me—neither of them. I might be an animal, a thing!"

"Are you really so neglected as you feel, Socorro?" mused her brother. "They are really helping you to decide. A woman usually prefers the winner."

"Rafael, you are outrageous!"

She flung off his arm and went into her own room.

"Now isn't that characteristic?" mused the brother. "Poor *chica!* To show her that all this is inevitable doesn't console her in the slightest degree. Somehow a woman can't lean back on mechanics and allow it to bear her where it will without hope or despair. No, there is something too vital about a woman to endure that. A woman is the *entrepreneur* of life. She will have nothing at all to do with death and the inevitable."

XXI

THE way in which old Ana clanged open the grilled entrance of the blue *casa* and shuffled into the entry told Angelito that she was excited and angry, and that she must have heard of his approaching duel. The bullfighter put down a foot to stop the faint oscillations of his hammock, where he swung between two columns of the *patio*, and lay with narrowed eyes watching the entry. The next moment he saw his mother hurry in with her board of lottery tickets; and immediately she shifted her physical haste into a verbal onslaught.

"This is what comes of running after fashionable *señoritas*—a fight! Getting disgraced in the papers! I have heard it! You might have been visiting a virtuous peon girl, but these silk-stockinged baggages, with half a dozen men hanging after them and fighting and brawling—"

The *torero* sat up in his hammock abruptly.

"Mother, don't speak of Socorro Jimenez like that!"

"*Caramba*, it's true! The world knows what you did. It came out in the paper!"

The bullfighter grew intensely angry.

"That's because the editor was cold muton for her, and tried to avenge himself by printing lies; but I've stopped him. He'll print no more of his filth after to-morrow!"

"God help you!" cried the old peon woman, aghast. "Are you going to kill a man on account of a *démirep*?"

The son leaped out of his hammock.

"*Madre*, if you call that lovely, innocent girl a—"

"*Demonio*, isn't she? Didn't she go out in the garden with you at night, and didn't her brother force you into the *casa* at the point of a sword and make you swear on the cross to marry her? Oh, I have heard it all!"

"God's lightning!" roared the *espada*. "Are they venting such damnable perjuries? I begged, I pleaded to marry her! She is an angel on earth!"

Old Ana's eyes widened in apprehension.

"Pancho, you are not really going to marry her, are you? Can't you give them the slip somehow?"

"I'll marry her if the saints preserve my life!"

Old Ana went into a fury.

"A thousand devils! Bring such a fly-by-night into my *casa*! I'll not have it! I'll not endure it!"

A certain relief went through Angelito that this subject was broached.

"Very well!" he agreed, with a little more composure. "I'll not bring her into your *casa*. I suppose that wouldn't do. No mother-in-law gets along with her daughter-in-law."

"What do you mean—that I'm to move out?" cried the old woman instantly. "I'll not move a peg! You can't put me out! Surely, if there is any justice in the laws, a son won't be allowed to put his old mother into the street!"

"No, I mean that you may have this

casa, and I'll get another. When I get a wife, naturally we must separate, *madre*. You know we have never done anything but quarrel all our lives. You beat me when I was small, and you have quarreled with me since I've been grown."

The old crone became furious again.

"*Cà*, you ungrateful son! All that you remember is my beatings and quarrelings. *Pues*, I remember getting up at night when you whimpered, patching your shirts, and selling mangoes in the streets to keep something in your belly! And now all I get for my slaving is that I quarreled and beat, and you'll turn me out of your home!" Tears of self-pity filmed the old woman's eyes. "May the holy saints forgive you, Pancho!"

She turned away to her own dirt-floored room at the back of the *casa*.

As the bullfighter watched her go, remorseful qualms seized him. He was moved to call after her that he was not turning her out of the *casa*, but would willingly go himself. Nay, more, he would put servants here to wait on her hand and foot; but to all this she shuffled silently to her room, her head wrapped in a coarse black *mantilla*, her board of tickets sagging under her arm. She was deeply wounded, and would remain so no matter what her son did or said.

Angelito drew a long breath of despair. Presently his thoughts came around to the duel that he was to fight on the following morning. He knew by Rafael's manner that the poet was greatly disturbed about the outcome of the duel, but Angelito himself was not anxious. Somehow he could not find it in himself to be apprehensive of the withered little editor. In fact, when the thought of Narciso Montauban crossed his mind, spasms of anger twitched through his great muscles, his nostrils expanded, and the veins stood out in his neck, like the bulls he fought in the arena.

All the rest of the day the bullfighter's mood fluctuated between anger at Montauban, rapture at his approaching marriage, and distress at the idea of having to cast off his old mother. He tried to think of some way to house his bride and his mother together; but when he saw old Ana going about with an obstinate expression on her old face, and refusing to address a word to him, he knew that that was impossible.

In the afternoon he set off to look up real estate dealers, and to find a finer *casa*

for his future wife. As he went about town, a number of men spoke to him about his approaching duel, and wished him good fortune.

That evening his duel occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else.

During the night, he was startled by a knock at his door. He was afraid it was the police, who might have come to arrest him for challenging the editor; but it proved to be his mother.

She stood in the doorway, with her face in high illumination from the candle in her hand. She begged Angelito not to buy another *casa* and move away from her. Loneliness would kill her in this great house. She would be like a lonely old bat in a cave.

She began weeping again, and her old face was convulsed with grimaces. Between sobs she promised that she would not scold any more, but would work in silence there in the *casa* as a servant for him and his wife. She said that she would work for the aristocrats once more, as she had worked for them in her youth. For years she had been free from them, but now they would enslave her again. This *señorita*, she knew, was marrying her son for his money, and she would fling it right and left, after the fashion of unvirtuous women.

So the old woman did her cause little good and much harm before she took herself back down the *patio* again.

There is a law in Venezuela, as in most countries, prohibiting dueling, but in Caracas there is a tacit understanding that duelists will not be molested at sunrise in a certain secluded level space beside the Guayra River, just above the Puente de Hierro. The theory is, apparently, that the Caracas police are not up at such an hour.

So the early morning found Angelito and his second, Señor Via, a quick-motioned little man whom Rafael had selected, *en route* for the conventional spot.

The Guayra River is little more than a brook in the dry season, but its flood bed is very wide, and the Puente de Hierro, or Bridge of Iron, spans the whole valley at a great height. The road that leads to this low dueling ground beside the Guayra breaks away from the street at the mouth of the bridge, and runs down into a banana truck farm. Through the rank growth An-

gelito's cab followed a mere cart track, with weeds and flowers growing in the middle and on both sides.

This rural-looking road reminded Angelito of his boyhood, when he worked on the cacao plantations. On just such roads he rode, a peon boy, in the great two-wheeled cacao carts. Now he was a *caballero*, in a cab, with an aristocrat for his second, on his way to fight a duel for the honor of a *señorita*. Truly the transition was a magical one!

Here the cab driver, peering down between the vehicle and the horses, said that another cab had been along the road this morning.

"The Montauban party," observed Señor Via, drawing out his watch. "They were early, we are prompt."

"I wish we had got there first," said Angelito, feeling that he had lost a certain point.

"That's of no consequence. Remember, you must keep perfectly cool and collected during the encounter. Don't allow a slight scratch to cause you to fling away caution."

"I think I have learned coolness in the bull ring," remarked Angelito, with a tinge of arrogance.

Sure enough, as they rounded the edge of the banana field, they saw two cabs and four men on a level grass plot in the midst of the lush growth along the river bank. As Angelito drove up, the men bowed ceremoniously. The bullfighter and Señor Via returned the salutations.

As Angelito bowed, it struck him as a ridiculous thing to be bowing to a man whom he meant presently to kill. In the Matadero he had been accustomed to starting a fight with boastings, abuse, and obscenity, not with bows.

Señor Montauban's second had a case of dueling swords, which, as Angelito could see, were considerably shorter than the rapier used in a bullfight. The editor's second was a red-headed man, who now approached Señor Via. The two seconds talked together for a few moments, pointed toward the sunlight, which filtered through the morning mists, and chose the positions of their principals with reference to it. Then the red-headed man presented Señor Via with the case of swords, and he, in turn, brought the weapons to the bullfighter.

Both were exactly alike, delicate weapons with silver-wrought hilts and slender blades. Angelito took up one, bent the

point to the guard as a test, and then accepted it. It was one of the handsomest swords he had ever seen.

"You will stand facing the north," directed Señor Via. "You will touch blades and then engage. Keep as collected as possible. Don't allow a scratch to irritate you. Now I believe the *caballeros* are waiting on our convenience."

Señor Montauban and his second were advancing toward the middle of the dueling ground. Angelito and his friend went forward to meet them. The other three men, the two cab drivers, and the surgeon grouped themselves near the selected spot, and watched silently, with the keen interest that such a spectacle provokes.

A certain feeling of unreality hung about the whole proceeding for Angelito. It did not seem possible that the small, dignified, slightly bald man who was stationed opposite, with a sword in his hand, could have written the scurrilous attack on himself and Socorro. Nor did it seem that he was really going to fight. Señor Montauban appeared too dignified to do either of these things.

Angelito himself was not in the least angry. As a matter of fact, to fight a formal duel for a stated cause was far too intellectual a proceeding for Pancho Pacheco. Such a proceeding required an abstraction of which he was incapable. The bullfighter badly needed the stimulus of abuse, oaths, and a buffet or two, before he could really begin to fight.

The *torero* stood with his sword held a trifle high, as if he expected Señor Montauban to charge at him like a bull and impale himself on his blade. The steels clicked together, and the two men fell into the peculiar doll-like poise of fencers.

For a moment Angelito stood feeling the strength of his opponent through his blade. It gave before his own iron wrist, and the next moment he lunged rather awkwardly. There was a whisper of steel, and his point passed harmlessly to the little man's side.

The bullfighter recovered with great swiftness, and lunged again. He passed over the little man's shoulder. At the same moment he saw a flicker of steel toward him, and felt a sting in his upper arm.

Angelito sprang back with a little wave of surprise at the adroitness with which he had been pinked; but, although he had retreated, Señor Montauban was just as close as ever. The editor's left arm and shoul-

der were swung behind him, giving the *torero* no target but the edge of a man.

It was with difficulty that the bullfighter parried his antagonist's thrust. He tried to address his blade and lunge in return, but Señor Montauban kept pressing him back, step by step, and kept him parrying, high, low, middle, face, legs, stomach.

A certain rising anger grew up in the peon at this sharp and persistent attack. The editor was like a machine, that went on perpetually driving him back and back. The *torero* had a feeling that his own sword was too long, that its point was useless.

He made a sharp effort to leap back suddenly, get his sword tip down, and drive in again; but his blade again encountered steel. It thrust off at an angle, while a hot streak up his forearm told him that he had been touched again.

At this second sting, and at the sight of blood staining his sleeve, wrath seized Angelito. There was something monstrous and hateful in this absurd little wooden figure with its edge turned toward him. Now that Angelito was hurt, the wrong this little editor had done Socorro flared up again in the bullfighter's heart. Abuse, unspoken, was on the tip of his tongue, and a pulse began beating in his temples.

He poised his sword as if at an oncoming bull, and lunged terrifically at the little man's heart. His point slithered to one side, but the two men met, and the bullfighter's momentum carried them several yards.

At the same instant Angelito felt a keen pain through the heavy costal muscles under his arm. They were breast to breast. The point of the *torero's* sword was thrust vainly into air behind his adversary, while Angelito was transfixed.

The bullfighter howled an oath, and like a flash loosed his sword and struck a full swing at the editor's jaw. There came a thud. The editor's hold on his own sword loosened, his slightly bald head flew back. The bullfighter lowered his mop of black hair and butted with terrific force into the pit of the little man's stomach.

The seconds and the surgeon shouted in horror at the ghastly sight of a man stuck through by a sword pounding, butting, and kicking a helpless antagonist into insensibility. They rushed on Angelito.

"*Diantre*, stop him! Catch him! Hold him! The madman!"

The three men grabbed and struggled

with the wounded giant. He flung them off with a whip of his body, and continued pounding and kicking his prostrate foe. In the scuffle, one of the men got his hand cut on the sword sticking in Angelito's flesh.

"You damned *bríbon!*" he howled. "What a cowardly attack!"

The red-headed second made a leap to get Angelito's sword and kill the bullfighter. Señor Via shouted to forbid it, and succeeded in getting his own arms locked around the big fellow's neck, throttling him and hauling him backward.

Angelito was cursing and roaring that they must let him alone, that he would kill the little imp of hell. In the midst of this his own second throttled his uproar and dragged him backward. It took the three to hold him back.

Montauban's second was in a furious rage.

"This devil from Hades! This mannerless wild man! It is our duty, *señors*, as *caballeros* and guardians of fair play, to kill this mad dog!"

Angelito's own second was crying:

"You infamous wretch, attacking your opponent with your hands! What are you—a *caballero* or a gorilla?"

"Here, you monster," the surgeon was saying, "let me pull that sword out of your side! Are you utterly devoid of all human sensations?"

As the red mist cleared before Angelito's eyes, he saw Señor Montauban prostrate on the ground. He straightened himself, and allowed the surgeon to approach him peaceably.

"The infernal little rat!" snarled the bullfighter. "I'll show him what it means to print his damnable articles about such a saint of a girl! I can whip an *estancia* full of such puny little aristocrats! I'm the best man in Caracas!"

He boasted, and cursed, and held himself stiffly against the surgeon, who was pulling the steel from his side. The doctor had poured iodine on the protruding blade so that it would sterilize the wound as he withdrew it. The iodine felt to Angelito as if the surgeon were drawing a red-hot iron through his flesh. He did not grunt, but he did stop his cursing.

All the party were utterly disgusted at this attack on the editor, so utterly outside the conventions of a duel—all except the two cab drivers, who were peons. These two winked at each other, and made sharp,

striking gestures with their fists, to show that they were intensely pleased.

Señor Montauban did not need a surgeon. He was jolted and jarred, but did not have a scratch. Presently he revived, and, seeing the bullfighter's blood on his own clothes, asked if Angelito had wounded him. He seemed to remember nothing of what had occurred.

"No! No! You are not wounded, *señor*," cried the surgeon, "but you have been assaulted in a most cowardly and shameful fashion. It has been a disgraceful fiasco. I, for one, repent that I came out here at all. To call this spot the field of honor would be to expectorate on decency. The best that all of us can do is to go back to the city and never pay the slightest attention to this unmannerly yokel again!"

He swung his head furiously toward Angelito. The bullfighter was now beginning to be ashamed of his own violence.

"He made me mad," he grumbled in faint extenuation.

"*Caramba!*" snarled the red-headed man.

The two parties climbed back into the cabs, but this time they were divided differently. Neither the surgeon nor either of the two seconds would ride with Angelito. They and Señor Montauban got into one cab, while Angelito and the two drivers used the other.

XXII

By the time the morning mists had fully cleared away from the valley of the Guayra, polite society in Caracas was amazed and horrified at the conduct and the upshot of the duel. Amazement came that Señor Montauban had proved himself a more skillful swordsman than the famous *diestro*, horror at the brutal and shocking conclusion of the encounter.

By noon the most exaggerated tales were all over the city. Angelito, with his bare hands, had maimed his rival for life. The editor's blade had pierced the *torero's* lungs. The physicians and surgeons of Caracas were so outraged at Angelito's breach of etiquette that not one would dress his wounds, and he lay slowly dying in the blue *casa* on Traposo Calle.

Other stories were that Angelito was not dying, but that Señor Montauban would certainly challenge him again, and would kill him the next time; that Angelito had

hopelessly disqualified himself as a *caballero*; and so, on and on.

By two o'clock—that is to say, immediately after her siesta—Margarita Miraflores brought a selection of these versions to the Jimenez villa in Paraiso. A number of them were mutually contradictory, but with the ladies that did not shake their credibility, either singly or in the lump.

As soon as Margarita reached the *señora's* door, she began pouring forth her news in breathless Spanish.

"It was a terrible scene, *señora*. Señor Angel was stabbed in a dozen places, and a sword was sticking through his liver when he assaulted Narciso."

The *señora* dropped her embroidery.

"Is he dead?" she inquired, and her voice was ghastly.

"No, but he will die. All the surgeons in Caracas have refused to dress his wounds!"

"Maria in heaven! But why?"

"Because he *assaulted* Narciso!"

The girl stressed the word with a sharp nod.

"But didn't they go out there to assault each other?" said the *señora*.

"Yes, but he threw away his sword and beat him with his hands. He flung him on the ground and kicked him, and all with a sword sticking through him!"

"Through Narciso?"

"No—through Señor Angel!"

"Holy Mary!" gasped the *señora*, turning pale. "That sounds like some wild beast one reads about in African travels."

"Oh, the whole city is outraged at it! Everybody is talking about it, and saying how shameful it is, and what an insult on poor Narciso!"

"*Dios te oiga!*" cried Socorro. "To be flung on the ground wasn't half as bad as to be run through with a sword!"

"Socorro!" cried the *señora*. "It's the insult of the thing, for that great bull of a *hombre* to be beating a *caballero* with his hands! Suppose it had been Rafael! You can see that, can't you? *Huy*, what an insult!"

"Every one says that it was utterly indecent, and must be avenged," rattled Margarita viciously.

"How badly is Señor Angel wounded?" asked Socorro, with a colorless face.

"Oh, badly! He can't get well!" declared Margarita, instinctively giving the worst version she had heard.

Socorro rose excitedly.

"And his wounds are not dressed?"

"Now, Socorro!" cried her mother.

"You are not going down there?"

"Of course not, mother, but I want to get a doctor to him."

"But the doctors won't go!" cried Margarita.

"Pues, I can send Rafael. He's clever about everything. He could dress a wound."

"Socorro, I can't understand you! How can you consider resuming your unfortunate relations with that man, when he has disgraced himself in a duel? Don't you realize that the whole city is holding him up to contempt?"

"*Absoluto*, every one is talking about it, Socorro," seconded Margarita. "Every one says Señor Angel's honor is gone. He is *sin vergüenza*. He can't live over it, no matter whether he gets well or not!"

"I don't care what they say!" cried Socorro. "He did the most sensible thing, under the circumstances. If Narciso were sticking me with a sword, I'd knock him over, too, if I could! Holy Mary, they were fighting, weren't they? I'm glad he beat Narciso! I'm glad! He's been needing a beating for a long time!"

"Socorro!" gasped Margarita.

"Daughter, what unwomanly sentiments!" cried her mother.

"I don't care! Narciso is a prig, and I could beat him myself!"

"Socorro!"

As Socorro hurried into the *patio* toward her brother's room, she heard Margarita calling angrily after her:

"Everybody says, *everybody* says—"

XXIII

RAFAEL JIMENEZ looked up at his sister's entrance, saw her face, and immediately asked in a shocked tone:

"Is he dead?"

"No, but you must go to his *casa* quickly, Rafael. He is badly wounded, and not a surgeon in Caracas will go near him!"

"What?"

"The doctors won't help him!"

Tears filled Socorro's eyes. Rafael dropped his pencil and looked at her.

"Who told you such rot?" he asked.

"Margarita, just this moment!"

"Don't you know that's silly? A surgeon not go near a wounded man—a rich wounded man! Did she say why?"

"B-because he—he picked Narciso up and flung him down during the fight!" gasped the girl.

"Did he do that?"

"Y-yes, with a sword sticking through him. Oh, Rafael, it's horrible! And Narciso is going to challenge him again!"

Rafael got up and limped a little way from his writing desk.

"Stop, don't jump at every wild tale you hear! That's a most absurd story!"

"But, Rafael, everybody says—"

"Says what?"

"That he's in disgrace, and they'll have to fight again!"

Socorro's eyes were full of tears, and she bit her lips, to keep from sobbing outright. Rafael patted his sister encouragingly.

"A lot of that is gossip. I'll go find out what truth there is in it."

"Bien! Do go and see if he has a surgeon, Rafael!"

"He either has one or doesn't need one."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am, Socorro. But that tale about Narciso going to challenge Angelito again—I'll look into that."

He started limping about his study, trying to find his hat. Socorro, who had been somewhat calmed by her brother's manner of accepting the news, now started thinking on a less urgent but equally painful topic. She had several minutes for her reflections, for Rafael's room was in disorder, and his hat was lost. When he found it, and was nodding good-by at the door, she asked in a small voice:

"Rafael, do—do you think he really was dishonorable?"

"Who?"

"Señor Angel."

"Quite likely. What did he do?"

"Rafael!" reproached the girl.

Then she repeated, in a desolate tone, that Señor Angel had flung away his sword in the midst of the duel, leaped at Narciso, and butted him over. The poet stood listening. Gradually his composure gave way, and he began laughing immoderately before her outraged eyes.

"Huy, Rafael! Rafael!" she cried.

"I can just see Narciso tumbling over," explained the poet. "I know how shocked and amazed he was."

"But was it dishonorable?" pressed the girl impatiently.

Her brother became sober, and made a gesture.

"Now, my dear, what sort of honor do you mean?"

"Oh, holy Mary!" sighed his sister, at the end of her patience. "I might have known I could get no sense out of you!"

But Rafael was not to be denied this philosophic point.

"Pues, Socorro, that is a very simple thing," he said gravely. "What we call honor is a term which means the rule of conduct in a certain locality among a certain class. Here in Caracas we have Spanish honor, peon honor, Carib honor, negro honor. Before I could possibly answer your question you will have to tell me to what sort of honor you refer."

"You know I wouldn't speak of Carib or negro honor!"

"Probably not. I was simply giving you an idea of how many codes there were. When you analyze it, any code of honor is what a certain class of folk has found expedient to do under certain circumstances. When a man like Angelito comes up from one social sphere to another, a great many things which were honorable down below are considered dishonorable above. For instance, in a fight, peons butt with their heads, Spanish *caballeros* do not. I should say that the essential ingredient of dishonor is originality, or the element of surprise. Victorious armies have uniformly used dishonorable methods, from the standpoint of the vanquished. Great financiers always have shady reputations. Successful politicians—but really that is too tainted a topic even to use as an illustration."

"Rafael," said Socorro, "from what you say I have no idea what you think about Señor Angel. I do wish you would go and see how he is getting along!"

The poet perceived that his sister was not as much interested in his reasoning as he was himself. He gave it up, went back to his writing desk, picked up a manuscript, put it into his pocket, and turned toward the door.

Socorro watched this act with evident disapproval.

"Rafael, you are not going to read that to Señor Angel, are you? Remember that he is wounded already."

Rafael said he might strike up with some friend or other, and Socorro told him that he was cold-hearted to think of such a thing, under the circumstances.

Oddly enough, when he got outside the Jimenez lawn, Rafael hailed neither cab nor

street car, but limped along the boulevard, studying the pavement in deep thought. When he came to the Montauban château, with its heavy, solemn Spanish architecture, he stood undecided for a moment, and then went inside.

Rafael Jimenez never entered the Montauban *casa* without a faint feeling of irony that such a gravely handsome structure should be wasted on such a man as Narciso Montauban. For Narciso to brood in such a nest, and produce such an egg as *Sol y Sombra*, was simple bathos.

"Now," thought Rafael, "the poem I have in my pocket would be worthy of the height of these walls and the spring of this ceiling; but Narciso—"

He shrugged very faintly as he moved with halting gait along the great hallway of the château.

He found Narciso in a study which was as severely simple as the great oaken rafters overhead and the polished floor underfoot were rich. The long, narrow windows gave the study a somewhat monastic effect, which Montauban's slightly bald head accented.

The editor of *Sol y Sombra* was apparently no whit the worse for the drubbing Angelito had given him. He sat at his great flat yellow writing desk, on which were neatly arranged some papers, manuscripts, and a pile of galley proofs.

The journalist was evidently surprised to see Rafael. The poet began a carefully prepared conversation by asking his former friend if he might tell him how shocked and grieved he had been at the appearance of the vindictive article in *Sol y Sombra*, and how deeply he regretted the rift between their families.

At this Señor Montauban's thin face paled somewhat, but he asked in an even voice if he might tell Rafael how shocked and wounded for life he had been when he and Rafael had blundered into the Jimenez garden on the most unhappy night of his existence.

As Narciso said this, he did indeed look, to use his own Spanish hyperbole, "wounded for life." His sallow face had the thin, drawn look that comes from some continued strain. Rafael began to perceive vaguely something of the depth of his former friend's wound—a phase of the unfortunate affair which had heretofore escaped him, because of a brother's congenital inability to conceive of any mortal man really hav-

ing a tender passion for his sister. Now he suddenly felt sorry for the editor.

"I saw that you were shocked, Narciso. So was I; but even at that I simply couldn't understand your article."

"You couldn't?"

"Frankly, no. I could not understand how a man could sit in a study like this and write such a thing."

The poet's old admiration for his friend's study, and his impersonal attitude toward the insult thrown at his family, aroused in the editor some of his former liking for young Jimenez.

"The truth is, Rafael," said Montauban drearily, "I don't understand it myself. The next morning, when I read my own article in my paper, I was dismayed. It seemed impossible that I had written such a thing. That night I must have been mad!"

"*Olà! Olà!*" ejaculated Rafael, divining the storm in his friend's heart, and marveling that Socorro had caused it. He cast about for some way to console his friend. "Pues, after all, Narciso, this—er—misfortune at least will leave you more leisure for your literary work. You did spend a lot of time at our *casa*. I have often thought—"

"You mean my work on *Sol y Sombra*?"

"Yes."

The editor pushed away the proofs on his table, as if they were distasteful to him, and arose.

"I am through with *Sol y Sombra*!"

"You are what?"

"*Dios*, yes—I'll either sell the paper or let it drop. I'm through. I never before realized what barren, futile work it is. To spend one's life recording the doings of illiterate peons who have learned to stick a bull—what a beggarly occupation!"

The poet stared at him blankly.

"What will Caracas do without a sporting paper?"

Señor Montauban made a gesture which meant that it was no concern of his.

"What are you going to do yourself?"

"I don't know. I am thinking of going to Paris."

"For a permanent residence?"

"I think so."

Rafael, still with intent to console, made a few vague suggestions about love and marriage. He said something about the biological tendency of persons to marry their opposites—blondes, brunettes; tall

men, short women; fat men, thin women; and, naturally, aristocrats, peons.

The editor did not seem impressed with this theory, for he made no reply.

"What I really dropped in to ask you, Narciso," said the poet, "is this—is it your intention to—er—pursue the unpleasantness of this morning, on account of what Angelito did?"

The editor's expression changed.

"I have never before accepted a blow like that, Rafael!"

"Still, a blow in a fight is not on the same footing as a blow meant as an insult. Besides, Narciso, you might have foreseen that Angelito would have reverted to his peon method of fighting, if pushed to it. That was his reflex action when angered. It would be foolish to expect him to change his reflexes merely because he had a sword in his hand."

"The trouble with you," said Señor Montauban dryly, "is that you utterly destroy honor, will power, and self-direction with your mechanistic theories, Rafael."

"*Caramba!*" cried the poet, rather touched. "Honor, will power, and self-direction are all right as long as one doesn't mix the classes; but when you bring two men together who are fundamentally different, you might know there would follow a confusion of method, and that's dishonor. You ought never to have accepted a challenge from a peon, Narciso, and you certainly ought never to issue one to a peon. Anything so formal as a duel is impossible between men of different classes. All they can do is to fight." The poet bowed. "Now that is what I wanted to say, and I thank you for the courtesy with which you have heard me."

Rafael started limping toward the door of the study. Narciso followed him.

"I am glad you came, Rafael. Your conversation has been a pleasure to me." He hesitated, and then added: "I wish, Rafael, you would tell your sister how deeply I have regretted my impulsiveness."

"I will explain it to her, Narciso. She is really a very generous girl, according to her viewpoint of life."

"I know she is, I know she is, Rafael. Sometimes I have thought that Socorro never did really care for me. I don't know—little things—but she is a generous girl!"

As Rafael limped to the entrance of the château, he felt a little pang of disappointment at having found no opportunity to

read to Narciso the poem which he had in his pocket. It did seem that his sister's rift with Narciso was an unfortunate affair for every one.

XXIV

BARRING the contingency of a challenge from Narciso Montauban, Angelito's affairs smoothed and straightened themselves into the commonplace raptures of a betrothal accompanied with passionate love. The bullfighter became a regular visitor at the Jimenez villa. The *señora's* manner toward him softened from open hostility into her original chill and disapproving courtesy. Margarita resumed her light and teasing friendship, and occasionally Rafael called the *torero* into his study to hear his latest poem.

Angelito hit on the device of listening to the verses, nodding solemnly, and saying nothing. This gradually installed him in Rafael's estimation as a man of literary taste—"untrained, you know, but deep in his heart." The *señora* scoffed at such a dictum. Margarita laughed at it. Socorro believed it, and was not surprised.

Nevertheless, the fact that Angelito had challenged a man and had been wounded in defense of Socorro's good name gave him a sort of standing, even with Señora Jimenez. There is no way to satirize or ignore an act of this kind. It is as dogged a fact as money received, and cannot afterward be denied.

Naturally enough, the duel enhanced the bullfighter's attraction for Socorro. She showered on him the blind prodigality of a girl's first full-blown affection. She was at an age when she should normally have had several such emotional experiences, but these had been precluded by the protracted and rather tedious courtship of Señor Montauban.

Socorro had thought, at times, that she was in love with Narciso; at other times she was sure she could never love any one. Angelito's unfortunate dinner caused her to reconsider this point, but it was not until her transfiguration in the garden that there burst on her the possibilities of delight that lay in her brain, her body, and her whole nervous system—in brief, what one means by being in love.

It is true that since the night in the garden Socorro's reaction to Angelito's caresses never reached such complete abandonment, except on the evening when he came

back to her from the duel, wounded by Señor Montauban. Then the girl quite melted from tenderness and anxiety; but at other times she mixed with her yieldings a certain increasing display of intellectualism. She found herself setting right certain little mistakes that Angelito made in his Spanish, and suggesting little differences in his deportment.

Nevertheless, each evening she awaited her lover's coming with the utmost impatience. She was displeased if he did not first come quietly around to the music room, where she might have him for ten or fifteen minutes before she presented him to the family circle. His step on the walk, his tap at the window, were quite enough to catch her breath, to make her leap up and run to the side door, where she could slip into his powerful arms.

As soon as Socorro's affection had reached this intimate stage, she set about using all her influence to break Angelito's connection with bullfighting. She became chronically anxious for his safety.

"Light of my eyes," she would plead, "it is inhuman of you to torture me by entering the *circo*. Suppose something should happen to you!"

"But what else can I do, little heaven?" he would plead.

"What else, indeed? *Caramba!* What difference does it make whether you do anything at all? You might write poems, like Rafael."

"Holy San Miguel, me write a poem!"

"I write a poem," corrected Socorro.

"I write a poem," Angelito repeated after her.

"Rafael says you have talent. Music, then—why not develop your music? Your guitar speaks a thousand voices to my heart."

"But, adorable," he said, drawing her to him and smoothing her hair, "I have a great idea. I want to be the leading *diestro* of the world. I want to sail around the world with a great herd of wild bulls, like Juan Leon."

Socorro was horrified.

"But just think of it, traveling like a king through all the South American republics, going back to Spain, meeting the king himself, and you with me!"

"But how will you do it, *mi vida?*" asked the girl, beginning to be dazzled.

"By the reputation I make in the *corrida* with Juan Leon."

"But, beloved," cried Socorro, "you can't go into the *corrida* with your wound!"

"Oh, my dear, I am like tar. Thrust a sword through it, draw it out, and the place heals instantly. Now feel here at this place in my side, to see how nicely it has healed."

"O-oh, Angelito—I won't do it!"

"Yes, do. It is cured!"

He took her hand, and forced it inside his clothes to his wound. They slipped into each other's arms with the innumerable and protracted kisses of young lovers in hot latitudes.

However, Socorro's anxieties always returned to Angelito's dangerous profession. One day she took the *torero* to Rafael's study, to talk the matter over with her brother.

The girl laid the matter before the poet with vehemence, and demanded that he should show Angelito how wrong he was to continue in the ring.

As usual, Rafael did not give the sort of advice his sister was seeking. He told Socorro that if she hoped to preserve her present tenderness and passion for Angelito, he certainly had better continue in the bull ring.

The girl was astonished and indignant that Rafael should suggest that Angelito's profession had anything to do with her affection for him.

"I am fond of Angelito purely for himself," she insisted tartly. "Do you imagine his risking his life in the *circo* makes me care for him more keenly? It just makes me anxious and miserable, that's all."

"But your anxieties increase your emotions, Socorro," argued the poet, with gathering impatience. "In fact, the danger a man risks is a sort of premium that he pays on his love insurance."

"Rafael, you have chosen an ill time for a joke!"

"Joke! That's not a joke. It is a trait built into all womankind. It is the foundation of romance. You will have to admit that if you had never seen Angelito in the arena, you would never have been impressed by him in the first place."

"Perhaps not, just at first, but now, of course—"

"There you are! You see, it is in your blood. That trait was cultivated in you by hundreds of thousands of years, during which man's chief occupation was fighting. If the old cave women had not acquired a

taste for returned heroes, the world would have been given over to cowards, and our race would have retrograded. So, for the man of to-day to hold the genuine passionate attachment of his wife, there must be something risky in his occupation."

"What a shameful idea! Can't a woman love a man for himself alone? That's what every man and every woman wants—love for their real selves"—she tapped her bosom impulsively—"not for their wealth, rank, position, beauty, or anything but themselves!"

The poet wagged a sardonic finger at his sister.

"Nobody has a real self in the sense in which you use the term, Socorro. There is no one thing about you or any one else which is yourself. Every person is a plexus of innumerable influences. His clothes, his wealth, his language, his appearance, his social standing, the house he lives in, the clubs he frequents, his likes and dislikes, his sense of humor, his love of poetry or of beer—all these are factors in his repulsion or attraction for any other human being.

(To be concluded in the April number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

All these and a million other items are included in that very vague term 'self.' When a girl imagines she has any one concrete thing in her which is herself, and asks to be loved for herself alone, she is talking nonsense. It is on a par with the belief in Santa Claus, and all the other items in the mythology of childhood."

Socorro looked at Rafael vexedly.

"Sometimes I wish I never had a brother like you! Occasionally you say a bright thing, but I never go to you for anything especial but what I get the silliest talk I ever heard!"

She stood looking at the poet in disgust, and then broke out again:

"The idea that Angelito here isn't one person! That he is like a bundle of sticks, and if you took one stick away—his bull-fighting, for instance—perhaps I wouldn't like him any more! I think the main reason you are so silly, Rafael, is because you never loved a human being in all your life!"

The poet watched the two lovers go out of his study without saying anything more.

A THOUGHT OF SUMMER

WHEN winter goes—
Would it were gone!—
With all its snows,
Into the sweet oblivion
Of the wild rose,
So that its very name
Is lost in summer's flame—
Oh, love, when June's sun glows,
And you smell sweet
As flowers do with the heat,
Breathing out myrrh
From breast and mouth and hair,
Oh, I shall play the bee,
And at your flower
Make honey every shining hour,
Or be the butterfly that sips
The nectar from your parted lips,
Or be the rocky pool—
Ah, that were best!—
Whose waters cool
Run over your white breast;
Or the green bank be I,
Where afterward you lie,
All marble to the sky!

Oliver C. Moore